

**Emotional release in Jon Ole Olstad's choreographies:
Kinesthetic experiences through a dancer's perspective**



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Abstract

Dance is a kinesthetic artform. In “Emotional release in Jon Ole Olstad’s choreographies: Kinesthetic experiences through a dancer’s perspective”, Rosa Poels investigates how the emotional release she and other dancers experience while dancing a choreography by the Norwegian contemporary choreographer Jon Ole Olstad in class is caused. Starting from James J. Gibson’s definition of kinesthesia as “the muscular connection to our deepest feelings” (Foster 117), Poels shifts away from the studies of kinesthesia from a spectator’s point of view and focusses on the kinesthetic experiences of dancers in class. After mapping how from John Martin until now, the role of emotions in dance has been researched, she states how kinesthesia and emotions can be defined from the perspective of a dancer. The connection between a dancer’s body and emotions plays an important role.

Based on an in-depth interview with the choreographer, Poels discusses what characterizes Olstad as a dancer and teacher. Being a vulnerable dancer and a Gyrokinesis teacher, Olstad’s movements strongly connect to his emotions and movement sensations. This makes his work suitable for research on kinesthetic experiences and emotional release among dancers. These experiences are defined by both Olstad, Poels herself and Olstad’s assistant Leslie Plummer.

In order to find out what it is in Olstad’s choreographies that stirs up kinesthetic experiences causing an emotional release, Poels analyzes four videos of herself dancing choreographies in Olstad’s class, to find a common thread. Based on Rudolf Laban’s motion factors in *Laban Movement Analysis*, Olstad’s choreographies and their movement qualities are articulated. Like in earlier analyses by Shantel Ehrenberg, the kinesthetic experiences and memories of dancers are used to express the sensation behind the movements. Together with the analysis of the musical choreography and the position Olstad and a dancer take in in class, this provides a clarification for the cause of emotional release in dance. By using her own embodied knowledge and kinesthetic memories in her analyses, Poels shows it is beneficial to incorporate the voice and experiences of dancers in research on causes of emotional release in dance.

Foreword

“Stop school, dance forever” is what Jon Ole Olstad wrote to me in a note after the first week I took his classes in Stockholm in 2018. Ever since I started my academic studies, I have had a love-hate relationship with studying. Growing up in my mother’s dance studio, my love for dance developed at a young age. Dance has always brought me great joy and felt like an outlet for my emotions. Because I wanted others to experience this joy as well, I decided to become a dance teacher. I have been teaching since I was sixteen years old, but also wanted to develop myself academically. Therefore, I started to study at the university. Unfortunately, I soon found out that this was not where my heart was, but it took me two years to admit it. I switched from *Greek and Latin Language and Culture* to *Arts and Culture studies*, in which I always missed the art of dance, but fortunately I was able to develop myself as a dancer and teacher besides my studies. It took me until the day I started writing this thesis to find the right balance between my academic studies and my dancing.

In this whole journey of finding out who I am as a dancer, teacher, student and human being, Jon Ole Olstad has played an important role. In his classes, I learned to switch off my mind and completely surrender myself to his movements. When I dance his choreographies, the world around me stops and I connect to my deepest emotions. From the moment I first had such an emotional release in class, I started wondering why and how this happened. I have had many conversations with him and Leslie Plummer, his assistant and friend, who through these emotional releases became a dear friend of mine as well. I want to thank you both for your endless support and your trust in my work. I could not have done it without you. Thank you for reading with me during my writing process, and for your openness in my research. I dedicate this thesis to you.

I also want to thank Laura Karreman, my supervisor, for her trust in researching a matter that is very close to my heart. Thanks to you, I was finally able to bring together my academic studies and passion for dance.

Last but not least, I want to thank my family. Because of the support of my parents Jan and Wilma and my sister Julia, I dared to expose myself in this thesis. You stood by me in every step I took in my academic studies and dance career, and always helped me to get back on my feet when I lost my balance. Without your encouragement, I would not have been where I am now. I also want to thank my grandparents Jan and Els, for their encouraging words when I lost my way. They have taught me that everything eventually falls into place.

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Introduction

In the winter of 2018, I travelled to Stockholm to take contemporary dance classes by the Norwegian choreographer Jon Ole Olstad. I met him a few months earlier at an international dance festival in Italy, where he performed a solo that intrigued me very much. His fluent, spacious, ongoing way of moving and his emotional expression stirred something up inside of me. I did not know why, but I felt in my guts that I had to take his class. My senses were right, because during the classes in Stockholm, I experienced an emotional release I had not experienced before. I did not know why or where it came from, but it felt as if his choreography opened up a door to my emotions that had been shut for a long time.

Whenever I dance Olstad's choreographies, my bottled-up emotions come out and it regularly results in crying. I remember several moments after class, where I embrace another dancer, both crying and letting our emotions flow. This emotional release is thus something not only I experience, but other dancers sense this as well. We are in a safe space so it is all good to let these emotions flow, but where does it come from? Jon Ole Olstad's way of moving does not come from common dance steps, but from an internal sensation that is expressed in movements. In this thesis, I investigate what it is in Jon Ole Olstad's choreographies that causes an emotional release among dancers.

Kinesthetic experiences from a dancer's perspective

In order to explain the emotional release dancers – including myself – experience while dancing a choreography by Olstad, I use the concept of kinesthesia and analyze what it is capable of. Kinesthesia is initially defined as “the muscular sense of the body's movement” (Foster 74). James J. Gibson, an important psychologist in the debate on kinesthesia, defined kinesthesia more specifically as “the muscular connection to our deepest feelings, and as the orientor of our senses and sense of identity” (Foster 117). Understanding kinesthesia from Gibson's definition, there is a link between the sensation of movement and emotions.

Thinking of when I dance Jon Ole Olstad's choreographies, I experience both muscular sensations of my body and a connection to my feelings. Therefore, I do not only look at kinesthesia itself, but also investigate how kinesthesia and emotions are connected and how they relate to dance.

When reading texts about kinesthesia and dance, what stands out is that most of the texts are written from the experience and point of view of the audience. For example in Mary

M. Smyth's "Kinesthetic Communication in Dance" and Gabriele Brandstetter's "Listening: Kinesthetic Awareness in Contemporary Dance," kinesthetic experiences are described as if they are sensations in the perceiver's body and not something that happens in the dancer's body as well. However, when taking a close look at the emergence of the word kinesthesia, as "the muscular sense of the body's movement" (Foster 74) it does not imply an outside (or audience) muscular sensation while perceiving another body move. It is about a sensation through one's own bodily movements. If one thinks about bodies where a strong connection has been made between muscles, sensations and emotions, the dancer's body is an excellent example. Therefore, it is remarkable there is no wide range of texts about kinesthesia and dance from a dancer's perspective. Even Foster, who is a dancer and choreographer herself, mainly focusses on audience perspectives in her texts about kinesthesia, although she is familiar with dancers' experiences as well. My thesis addresses this lack by focusing on kinesthetic experiences of dancers instead of spectators, combined with tacit knowledge of myself and other dancers. I specifically look at kinesthetic experiences of dancers in class, where the much researched kinesthetic experiences of audience members are disregarded.

Research question

As stated before, my thesis fills in a gap in the research field of kinesthesia and dance. Because of their bodily instead of verbal communication, which can also be described as tacit knowledge, dancers have been taken less seriously when it comes to doing research (Goellner and Murphy 2). Therefore, there is not yet as much known about dance experience in an academic way as there could have been. Fortunately, research on kinesthetic experiences of dancers is emerging. By using my personal somatic experiences as a resource, my thesis contributes to the current enhancement of academic research from a dancer's embodied knowledge.

To fill in the niche of how a choreography stirs up kinesthesia resulting in an emotional release among dancers, I use videos in which I dance Jon Ole Olstad's choreographies in class as my case studies. Through this research I aim to find an answer to the questions why and how dancing Jon Ole Olstad's choreographies seems to open something up inside of dancers that causes an emotional release. Taking his classes every once in a while, seems like a kind of therapeutic session through which I can let go of things that, both consciously and unconsciously, have been on my mind. After this 'session' of dance classes, my emotions go in all directions for a few days, to finally put my mind at ease and to let me start over with a clean slate. This emotional release is not something only I, but also

other dancers experience. However, I only analyze my own videos because of the kinesthetic memories I have. I cannot analyze videos of other dancers without their active involvement in the analysis. Actively involving other dancers goes beyond the capacity of my thesis, but is a valuable addition in further research.

To find out where the experiences of emotional release come from and to contribute to the academic niche of kinesthesia and dance, my research question is as follows: ‘How does dancing a choreography by Jon Ole Olstad stir up kinesthetic experiences that cause an emotional release?’.

I aim to answer this question respectively on the basis of the following three sub-questions:

1. How can the intersection of kinesthesia and emotions be defined from the perspective of a dancer?
2. How can the work of Jon Ole Olstad as a contemporary choreographer be positioned in the debate of kinesthesia, emotions and dance?
3. How do choreographies by Jon Ole Olstad cause a release of emotions among dancers?

Methodology

To answer my research question, my thesis is divided into the abovementioned sub-questions. These questions each stand for a chapter and build towards an analysis of the case studies, which are video recordings of me dancing Jon Ole Olstad’s choreographies in class.

Of the three chapters, Chapter 1 is the most academic. Based on a broad literary research, consisting of amongst others Foster and Brandstetter, I map where my understanding of kinesthesia comes from, focusing on kinesthesia from a dancer’s point of view. With the help of dance theorist John Martin’s findings on emotionality in dance, that has both been embraced and criticized by Matthew Reason, Dee Reynolds and Maaïke Bleeker, I elaborate on the connection between kinesthesia and emotions and how these two are strongly connected to dance as well. I also shed light on the relationship between a choreographer and dancer in class and how this affects the kinesthetic experiences of dancers.

In the second chapter I discuss Jon Ole Olstad as a choreographer. What defines him? Where does he come from and what is central in his choreographies? I conduct an interview with him, in which I try to get to the heart of his work and his working methods. I investigate how Olstad feels about kinesthesia and how his work connects to his inner sensations and emotions. To support my findings, I also use interviews and other articles about him. In

addition, the experiences of another dancer, Leslie Plummer, are taken into account to provide a broader base of support.

Chapter 3 is all about my case studies. I choose four videos, one of each week where I got to work with Olstad between February 2018 and November 2019. I shortly elaborate on my method of analyzing the videos, based on amongst others Rudolf Laban's Movement Analysis method and Shantel Ehrenberg's dance analysis method in which she used kinesthetic experiences of dancers. I aim to find specific elements in the choreographies that cause an emotional release. I analyze the movements, their quality and musicality, and Olstad's behavior in class. I also take a close look at how I dance the choreographies and see if something striking can be noticed in my dancing. My kinesthetic memories are taken into account to support what cannot be seen but only felt by the dancer. In that way I aim to go back to the emotions I experienced while dancing and try to find out where they come from and how they are released.

Chapter 1

The intersection of kinesthesia and emotions from a dancer's perspective

In this chapter, the concept of kinesthesia is used to explain the inner sensations a dancer experiences while moving. Dancers have a strong connection between their body and their emotions, which allows them to express their deeper feelings through movements. Although kinesthetic experiences are difficult to fully explain in words, kinesthesia is an important concept to investigate where emotional release through dance comes from. Most research on kinesthesia focuses on the experiences of audience members, but in my research the focus lies on kinesthetic experiences among dancers. In these experiences, the choreographer in class plays an important role for dancers to kinesthetically connect their emotions with the given movements.

To eventually get a glimpse of where the emotional release I experience when dancing in Jon Ole Olstad's class comes from, this chapter lies the foundation for the concepts I use in my research. I do so on the basis of the following research question: 'How can the intersection of kinesthesia and emotions be defined from the perspective of a dancer?'

Kinesthesia: from other definitions to my own understanding

The word kinesthesia etymologically stems from the ancient-Greek verb κινέω, which means 'moving', and the noun αἴσθησις, which means 'sensation' and thus is understood as a sense of movement (Paterson 116). The word was introduced by the neurologist Henry Charlton Bastian in 1880. Bastian stated that in order to coordinate movement, the brain needs muscle sense, but there was no concept yet to define this unconscious sensation (Pearce 75). Since the introduction of the concept, kinesthesia has fundamentally been understood as a somatic sensation of muscular movement, which is not particularly linked to a mover or perceiver of movement. The sensation is defined as if it connects to everyone.

Throughout the years, a variety of understandings of kinesthesia from different fields have come to the forefront, as mapped by Susan Leigh Foster in her book "Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance".¹ During the nineteenth century, physiologists were engaged in investigations to discover how "one sense[s] one's own movement and sense[s] the orientation of that movement within the surrounding space" (Foster 74). They were aware of the position, movement, momentum and relationship to gravity a body perceives at the

¹ See Foster 73-75 for an overview of different scientific understandings of the concept of kinesthesia.

same time and discovered it all came from a variety of neural sensors in the body. Although it was Bastian in 1880 who came up with the term kinesthesia, this phenomenon had been a topic of interest for scholars before him as well. An example of an earlier researcher in this area is physiologist Thomas Brown, who stated in 1820 that “our muscular frame was not merely a part of the living machinery of motion, but was also truly an organ of sense” (Foster 74). From this observation, it can be said that our muscular frame, next to the other five senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and feeling, can be understood as the sixth sense, the sense of muscular movement.

In 1906, psychologist Charles Sherrington replaced Bastian’s term kinesthesia with the word proprioception, which etymologically stems from the Latin words *proprius* (own) and *percipere* (perceiving). As proprioception, Sherrington understood the ability of a body to perceive its own position (Patterson 123). After this renaming of the concept kinesthesia as proprioception, in the 1950’s perceptual psychologist James J. Gibson, revived the word kinesthesia. Gibson defined kinesthesia as “the muscular connection to our deepest feelings, and as the orientor of our senses and sense of identity” (Foster 117). In *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems*, Gibson emphasized that the term kinesthesia exclusively refers to “*body* movement, not movement of anything in the world” (Gibson 111). He stated that kinesthesia is almost the same thing as proprioception, although it cuts across the functional perceptual systems of orientation, hearing, seeing, feeling, tasting and smelling.

Gibson pointed at a strong link between the sensation of movement and emotions. He stated that dancers have a unique capacity for communication (Foster 118). Because of the strong connection between their bodies and their emotions, they are able to express their emotions through moving, which can be detected by audience members and move them. On the other hand, because of the control dancers have over their body and emotions, they are also able to perform with a main focus on their bodily vitality without explicitly revealing their emotions. Dancers thus make their audience wonder about the message that these movements contain. In line with these two forms of communication, Gibson distinguished two types of perceivers connected to kinesthesia: the dancer or mover and the audience. The first one, the dancer, perceives his or her own physical and emotional response while dancing. The second one, the audience, perceives his or her physical and emotional response through watching others move.

Gibson’s ideas about kinesthesia have had a significant impact on contemporary dance scholars. An example is Gabriele Brandstetter, a professor of theatre and dance studies. She talked about kinesthetic awareness, which she described as ‘listening’ or ‘to listen to motion’.

It is a kind of sensory awareness that “embrace[s] both conscious and unconscious ‘subliminal’ perceptions” (Brandstetter 165). In contrast to Gibson, who mainly focused on the capacity of our kinesthetic sense in giving information of one’s own body in relation to gravity and space, Brandstetter wrote about how this kinesthetic awareness is important in relation to other dancers. She used the example of contact improvisation, in which it is important to listen to and perceive the movements of the other dancer(s). Contact improvisation is a dance practice which is known for the continuous physical contact between two or more dancers, which benefits from a strong kinesthetic awareness among them about the other dancers’ bodies. However, kinesthetic awareness is not only important when getting in touch with another body. It is just as important beyond contact improvisation, for an individual dancer, to be in touch with and kinesthetically aware of one’s own body and experience internal sensations. Working with kinesthesia, also described by Brandstetter as the sixth sense, helps to focus on momentum, gravity, weight, chaos, release, contraction and spatial perception, which are all important aspects of dance (Brandstetter 166).

In contrast to the studies above, in which kinesthesia is mainly or at least amongst others defined as a sensation of movement from the perspective of a dancer, Mary M. Smyth defined kinesthesia from the perspective of the audience. In her definition, kinesthesia relates to “movement of one’s own body while the movement of another’s body must be perceived via one or more of the five exteroceptive systems” (Smyth 19). A kinesthetic experience within the body of an audience member is thus perceived by sensing someone else’s movements through the five senses of sight, touch, ear, taste and/or smell. The way a mover communicates messages to a spectator through dance is unclear. It happens in a subliminal way, in which the spectator not only uses the exteroceptive senses, but also the sixth sense of kinesthesia. Smyth’s understanding of kinesthesia fits with Brandstetter’s definition of kinesthetic perception. Brandstetter described this as “a ‘sharing’ between ‘mover’ and ‘observer’” (Smyth 177). However, Brandstetter wrote about kinesthetic perception within contact improvisation, where the moving dancer can be understood as the ‘mover’ and the responding dancer as the ‘observer’. They are both actively participating in the dance, while Smyth talked about an observer or perceiver who is seated in the auditorium, watching the dance from a distance.

In comparison with the position the earlier named scholars Gibson, Brandstetter and Smyth took in the debate around kinesthesia, ex-professional dancer and researcher Edward C. Warburton tried to find a middle ground. Warburton shed light on kinesthesia from the point of view of both dancers and an audience. He wondered what dancers experience when

they are dancing and also how the brain instantiates dance experience (Warburton 70). He talked about three intertwined realms of dance experience: somatic, kinesthetic and mimetic, in which somatic empathy as ‘feeling in’ movement provides a foundation for the kinesthetic ‘feeling of’ and mimetic ‘feeling for’ dance (Warburton 73). In order to get to a kinesthetic feeling of the connection between the body and inner feelings, one needs to have somatic sensations first. In dance experience, kinesthesia is thus understood as a sensorimotor kind of perception, in which the entire body is involved in describing what dancing feels like, that adds a deeper layer to somatic experiences. Warburton saw dancers “as interpretative artists” (Warburton 73). They interpret the movement vocabulary of a choreographer by physically reproducing it. At the same time, they use their expression and movement skills to translate the choreographer’s message to the audience. This combination of physical and emotional awareness and mastery makes dance a kinesthetic art form.

The views the scholars Gibson, Brandstetter, Smyth and Warburton have on kinesthesia together form the foundation of the understanding of kinesthesia I use in my research on experiences of kinesthesia and emotional release while dancing Jon Ole Olstad’s choreographies in class. As the origin of the word indicates, I see kinesthesia as a sensation of movement. It is the sixth sense next to seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling and touching. I concur with the definition of Gibson, who described kinesthesia as the “muscular connection to our deepest feelings” (Foster 117). Because of this strong connection, dancers are able to express their emotions physically in a subliminal way. Their kinesthetic awareness involves both physical and emotional awareness which provides them with a notion of gravity and space within themselves and in relation to other bodies.

Although a lot about kinesthesia has been said from the perspective or experiences of audience members, in my research I focus on kinesthetic experiences of dancers. It is thus about internal, muscular sensations within the person who is moving, causing an emotional release for this same dancer. To delve even more into these internal sensations of a dancer, my research focusses on kinesthetic experiences in a dance class. The previously named scholars all focused on staged dance experiences or presentations, which can from my understanding, if one intends to focus on kinesthetic experiences among dancers, have a negative impact on their experiences. On stage, dancers are aware of their audience and want to show the best version of a choreography. They try to dance as technically perfect as possible, and the focus is more on the aesthetics of the choreography than on the movement sensations. Being aware of the presence of other perceivers can thus influence to what extent a dancer feels free enough to let him- or herself go, which can then have an impact on their

kinesthetic sensation. In a dance class, when there is no audience, only dancers amongst each other, there is often a kind of safe space in which dancers can fall, let go and focus on how the movements feel instead of how they look. The space of a studio is thus more inviting to delve into one's inner sensations while dancing. In order to elaborate on this statement, I first dig deeper into the role emotions play in contemporary dance and how they are connected to the body.

Emotionality in dance: the connection of the physical and the emotional

After introducing the emergence of the phenomenon of kinesthesia, we now go back in time to take a look at the development of emotionality in dance, to eventually link these two phenomena in my research on how kinesthetic experiences cause an emotional release in dance. As stated before, dancers have a strong connection between their bodies and their emotions. The sixth sense of kinesthesia connects movement sensations to deeper feelings, which shows how through physical movement one can let go of hidden feelings and thus get moved emotionally. In the past seventy years, the interest for the connection between the physical and the emotional as a research topic in dance studies has grown.

One of the first researchers to write about emotions in dance between the 1930's and 1960's, is dance critic John Martin. For dancers, he stated, "dance is a way to express all forms of emotional experiences" (Martin 8). The expression of inner feelings is especially a characteristic of modern dance, which is also the main dance form in Martin's research. One of the pioneers in modern dance, who also played an important role in Martin's research, is Martha Graham. For Graham, the essence of dance is "the expression of mankind – the landscape of the human soul" (Graham 96). She thought that in order to be a good dancer, one should permit oneself to feel and to be vulnerable. With this statement, Graham endorsed the importance of a connection between the body and emotions among dancers. To elaborate on this connection, in his book *The Modern Dance*, Martin explained how "physical movement is the normal first effect of mental or emotional experience" (Martin 8). If one perceives something frightening, one recoils from it by moving backwards. If one is feeling happy, one automatically walks more upright. On the other hand, when one is feeling sad or insecure, one will more easily walk slightly bent and maybe even look at the ground. These examples show the connection between the body and emotions by describing physical reactions on a mental state. They are, however, also happening the other way around. Movements like imagining punching somebody in the stomach can stir up a feeling of aggression or causing a release of

aggressive feelings. Breathing in while reaching up to the sky, can give one a sense of freedom and make one feel happy and alive.

Since Martin, emotionality has continued to be a topic of interest within the field of dance studies. An example of an emotion-related research, in which the effect of dance on the mental state and thus the wellbeing of people was questioned, is done by the contemporary scholars Corinne Jola and Luis Calmeiro. They stated that “in the case of dance, it is important to understand that the brain’s activity spans across an extended network of areas involved in the processing of multiple sensory, motor, cognitive, and emotional functions” (Jola and Calmeiro 23). While dancing, diverse parts of the brain are activated that amongst others regulate our emotions. To elaborate on this brain activity, Bettina Bläsing, a researcher in mental representations of body, movement and space, explained how somatic sensations are processed in “the primary somatosensory cortex (S1), in which all tactile, proprioceptive, and kinesthetic information is assimilated” (Bläsing 43).² She wondered what happens in the brain of a dancer while dancing. Although there is no obvious answer, the strong connection between the body and the mind causes a reflection of a dancer’s emotional state in his or her movements. While moving, the parts of the brain that regulate our emotions are activated, resulting in an intersection between physical and emotional sensations within a dancer. Both Bläsing’s neurological exploration of brain activities while dancing and the research by Jola and Calmeiro about the effect of dance on the wellbeing of people, deepen Martin’s statement about how dance is an art form to express all kinds of emotional experiences. As stated before, physical and emotional sensations are detected by the sixth sense of kinesthesia. Through this connection, emotions can be released by the dancer in a subliminal way, which can subsequently cause kinesthetic experiences among an audience.

In order to find out how the intersection of kinesthesia and emotions can be defined from the perspective of a dancer, it is important to know in what way in dance feelings are communicated by the body. Although it is difficult to concretely explain how dance communicates subliminally, it is fair to say that this communication takes place when there is a strong connection between the body and senses of a choreographer, dancer and audience. I explicitly mention the connection between a dancer and choreographer or teacher, because the context in which I analyze a dancer’s kinesthetic experiences in Chapter 3, is a dance class. The connection between the body and senses of a teacher and a dancer also plays an important role in the field of somatic education and therapy, in which people are asked to “breathe, feel

² For a deeper, neurological explanation of the effects of dancing in the brain, see Bläsing 41-56.

and ‘listen to the body’” (Eddy 5) and thus to pay attention to bodily sensations. By movement exercises, somatic movement education and therapy tend to improve one’s psychophysical awareness and emotional difficulties. The purpose is to get more in touch with one’s emotions through movement and to refine one’s kinesthetic, proprioceptive sensitivity. Somatic education and therapy emerged at the same time as modern dance emerged. Both somatics and modern dance largely focus on the body and seek for ways to connect to and express inner sensations (Eddy 10). It is therefore no wonder that a big part of the somatic pioneers consists of dancers, since they are experts in ‘listening to the body’. I will not go into detail about somatic practices, but the therapy reveals that the communication between the body and the mind is important to overcome emotional difficulties. In that sense, somatic therapy shows the relevance of an intersection between kinesthesia, emotions and dance I am investigating.

Going back to the dance historical view on emotions in dance by Martin, instead of the more neurological explanation, one can state that “the body is the mirror of the thought” (Martin 8). Looking back in time, dance has always been a reaction of people to express themselves when they are deeply moved. Whether it is out of excitement or when hearing a song that touches something on the inside, our body starts to feel like moving. Especially for dancers, dance is a way to express feelings or thoughts that cannot be put into words. Graham’s famous quote “dance is the hidden language of the soul” says the same thing: by dancing, people express what their souls feel.

Although Martin elaborated on how in dance, the body is used for emotional expression, when it comes to kinesthetic experiences, he slipped up at some points. In “Martin, Massumi and the Matrix”, Maaïke Bleeker shed a light on Martin’s contradictions. She agreed, using Massumi’s *Parables for the virtual*, with Martin’s statement about an intrinsic connection between movement and feeling (Bleeker 152). However, Martin stated that the feelings aroused among the audience when perceiving a dancer, are universal and not our own feelings, but the feelings of the dancer projected upon ourselves (Bleeker 158). A kind of shift in kinesthetic awareness takes place, making an audience not aware of their own inner sensations, but perceiving someone else’s from a more distant point of view. With this statement, Martin contradicts his own description of how watching someone dance can touch a spectator’s inner feelings, as he now states how these feelings are not the spectator’s own feelings, but the feelings from the performer that the spectator is observing. I concur with Bleeker, who stated that this shift in Martin’s kinesthetic awareness contradicts his earlier statements around the involvement of one’s own body in perceiving other bodies. Every

human being has other emotional baggage they can associate with what they perceive in a dance performance, which makes it not possible to come to one objective, universal interpretation of dance. This especially applies for modern dance, where there mainly is no clear plot, like in traditional fairytale-like ballet performances, but the emotional expression of the choreographer and the dancers is central. The physical-emotional connection in dance Martin talked about, which has also been explained on a neurological level by scholars like Bläsing, endorses that kinesthetic experiences while perceiving someone dance certainly can stir up personal feelings.

The 'dancer-perceiver' vs. the 'choreographer-dancer' relationship

In contrast to the main focus of my research on kinesthetic experiences among dancers, Martin and Bleeker both addressed kinesthesia from a spectator's perspective. They paid attention to the relationship between a dancer and an audience when it comes to kinesthetic experiences and stirring up emotions. However, when it comes to an emotional release among dancers in class, I have experienced an important aspect that influences their kinesthetic experiences is the connection between the dancers and their teacher or choreographer. To endorse this statement, I firstly go back to the kinesthetic awareness of audience members.

In "Kinesthesia, Empathy, and Related Pleasures: An Inquiry into Audience Experiences of Watching Dance", Matthew Reason and Dee Reynolds asked a diverse group of audience members about their kinesthetic experiences after a dance performance. The group consisted of dancers with experience in diverse styles and on different levels. There were also non-dancers involved who have zero to a lot of experience in watching dance performances. Reason and Reynolds concluded that any kind of experience audience members have in performing or watching dance, influences their degree of 'inner mimicry', 'kinesthetic empathy' and 'kinesthetic sympathy' (Reason and Reynolds 71). These concepts, also known from Martin's theories, are all linked to the degree of connection between an audience member's body and emotions. When watching someone dance, one kinesthetic response is 'inner mimicry', which means that muscular sensations are created as if the perceiver or spectator feels the dancer's movements within his or her own body (Reason and Reynolds 60). The more the perceiver has experienced the dancer's movements him- or herself, the more inner mimicry is sparked. This inner mimicry plays an important role in the 'kinesthetic empathy' of a perceiver for a dancer, which is fueled by "experiences of embodied and imaginative connection between the self and the other" (Reason and Reynolds 71). In this definition, the 'self' should be understood as the audience member and the 'other'

as the performer. The level of dance experience of an audience member also influences the 'kinesthetic sympathy', which is described as "a more conscious, reflective response, such as comparison of the dancer's virtuosity or physique with one's own skill or figure" (Reason and Reynolds 62). Reason and Reynolds found in their research that the more a perceiver 'knows' about how tough it is and what it feels like to perform the movements the dancer makes, the more kinesthetic sympathy he or she will have for the dancer.

When comparing this 'dancer-perceiver' relationship Reason and Reynolds talked about to the relationship between a choreographer and dancer in class, similarities can be found. The dancer can be seen as the perceiver of the movements the choreographer is performing in class. According to Shantel Ehrenberg, who is not only a researcher and academic but also a dance practitioner herself, dancers master the "kinesthetic mode of attention" (Ehrenberg 44). In 'A Kinesthetic Mode of Attention in Contemporary Dance Practice', she described this as "a mode of intentional consciousness while dancing, which includes a number of elements, such as listening to the body's movements, problem solving with the body, a curiosity about bodily feelings in conversation with different choreographic and performative contexts" (Ehrenberg 44). Dancers have a strong physical and emotional and thus kinesthetic awareness, which helps them to develop kinesthetic sympathy and empathy for a choreographer, when he or she gives him- or herself while showing a choreography in class. Because of their kinesthetic attention mode, dancers are able to translate verbal descriptions of a choreographer into their own kinesthetic sensations. To do so, a dancer and choreographer first need to connect kinesthetically, which happens if they dare to be vulnerable amongst each other. This vulnerability means that they are not afraid to reveal their emotions, weaknesses, doubts or other sensations and characteristics of themselves that one is more likely to hide than to reveal openly. Ehrenberg's article did not lend itself to elaborate deeply on the use of the kinesthetic mode of attention among choreographers. However, it did come to the forefront that to kinesthetically connect with dancers, a choreographer needs to share the sensation and intention behind the movements, as it is done in somatics (Ehrenberg 54). When a dancer is familiar with the choreographer's intention and movement sensation, he or she can connect it to personal kinesthetic sensations. This results in a kinesthetic connection between the dancer and the choreographer, which is comparable with the relationship between an audience member and a dancer on a kinesthetic level.

Ehrenberg's statement that it is important for a choreographer to share his or her intention and sensation behind the movements with the dancers, is also endorsed by Foster. In "Movement's contagion: the kinesthetic impact of performance", she shed a light on

choreographies, which can be interpreted as a reflection of the emotional depths of the choreographer's psyche (Foster 49). When a choreographer teaches his or her work to other dancers, not only the movement phrases are transmitted, but his or her emotional intentions and feelings as well. This happens in the same subliminal way a dancer shares emotional messages with an audience during a performance. Although Ehrenberg stated that these emotional intentions are something a choreographer needs to express verbally, Foster here implied that this transmission already happens without specifically mentioning it.

Based on my own experiences as a dancer, I have observed like Foster, that there are emotional messages a choreographer carries over with movements, which a dancer will receive kinesthetically. However, I have also observed that if a choreographer is aware of this emotional message, it is helpful to try to express this in words, in order to enhance the kinesthetic experience of a dancer. Whereas in a dance performance inner feelings can only be conveyed in movement, in a dance class they can also be conveyed verbally. In comparison with the dancer-perceiver relationship, kinesthetic experiences among dancers while in class with a choreographer can thus take place on an even deeper level.

Kinesthesia and emotions from a dancer's perspective

When bringing the former stated reflections on kinesthesia, emotions and dance together, it can be said that dancers are in a key position when it comes to the intersection of kinesthetic experiences and emotional release. They can experience a strong kinesthetic awareness, because as dancers, they are well connected to their body and mind. Through their sensation of movement, they are able to connect with a choreographer's emotional intentions when he or she is teaching a choreography. The kinesthetic sympathy this connection arouses among dancers for the choreographer, can be linked to the dancers' own inner feelings. When a dancer performs a choreography, the emotional intention behind the movements thus contains both the dancer's own inner feelings and a reference to the choreographer's sensations while creating the choreography. If this performance is done on stage in front of an audience, it adds a different layer to the dancer's experience. Audience members, when perceiving a dance performance, respond kinesthetically to the sensations they can identify with. Although a performance evokes kinesthetic experiences among the audience, for a dancer, being aware of other perceivers has the consequence that he or she is less focused on personal inner sensations and more on how the audience will perceive the performance. To stay more focused on moments where this external perceiver in the shape of an audience is absent and the kinesthetic experiences of the dancer are central, the rest of my research mainly contains

moments of emotional release among dancers in a class when learning a choreography without the intention of eventually performing it on stage. In that case, the sensation of movements namely dominates the aesthetics and perfect technique that are important for a performance. In a dance class with no performing intentions, it is more about being in the moment and experiencing the movements, instead of visualizing them.

Going back to kinesthesia and emotionality in dance from a dancer's perspective, dance can be seen as an outlet for deep, hidden feelings. Dance is a way to express emotional experiences, as stated by amongst others dance scholar Martin. These emotions are detected and released through the sixth sense of kinesthesia. When defining kinesthesia, I agree with Gibson, who described kinesthesia as "muscular connection to our deepest feelings" (Foster 117). As stated by Smyth, it is through this muscular connection a dance performance can stir up emotions among an audience. However, in my research the focus lies on kinesthetic experiences among dancers, while dancing a choreography in class. The kinesthetic awareness Brandstetter defined, which involves both physical and emotional awareness, helps dancers to connect their body with their emotions. It is because of this connection a dancer can experience emotional release while moving. The fact that through movements one can express emotional feelings is confirmed on a neurological level by scholars like Bläsing, who elaborated how the parts of the brain that regulate emotions are activated when someone moves. Although this connection can neurologically be detected, the subliminal way dance communicates hidden messages stays difficult to clarify. Being called the sixth sense, kinesthesia stirs up experiences that are tough to fully express in words, because it is something that happens on the inside in an invisible way. However, it is through kinesthetic sensations that a dancer's movements connect with deeper feelings. Dancers can experience an emotional release when the muscular connection to their deeper feelings, which is known as kinesthesia, connects with their emotions.

Chapter 2

Positioning Jon Ole Olstad in the debate of kinesthesia and emotions

This chapter gives insights into Jon Ole Olstad as a dancer and choreographer. An overview of his dance career is provided, which lays the foundation for him as a dance maker. I conducted an in-depth interview with him, in which I aimed to get to the heart of his choreographies: What does dance mean to him? How does he see the relation between the body and emotions? I explain how Olstad in his dance connects with his emotions and how this can create kinesthetic experiences that cause emotional release among his dancers, as explained in the previous chapter. I will also bring the experiences of another dancer I interviewed to the forefront, to expand the ‘dancer’s experiences’ beyond my own. A transcript of Olstad’s interview and the interview with the dancer can respectively be found in Appendix 1 and 2.

In order to recognize what characterizes Jon Ole Olstad’s work when analyzing class videos in Chapter 3, this chapter lies the foundation by mapping how Olstad became the dancer, choreographer and teacher he is currently, what inspires him and what defines him and his dancing. I do so on the basis of the following research question: ‘How can the work of Jon Ole Olstad as a contemporary choreographer be positioned in the debate of kinesthesia, emotions and dance?’.

Jon Ole Olstad as a dancer

Jon Ole Olstad (Otta, 1987) was born in a small city in Norway where there were few possibilities to take dance classes on a regular basis. In his hometown, they organized a small amateur musical every year, where you had to be fifteen to participate. So when he was fifteen years old, Olstad danced for the first time, in the regional musical. It was at this moment when he thought “I really like dancing and I think this is something that I really want to do” (Olstad). At the musical, he met teenagers from another city two-and-a-half hours away by car, who went to a performing arts high school where you could select classes from the dance-drama department. Although it was far away from home and he had no experience taking ballet or jazz classes, he decided to audition because he was so excited to learn. Olstad never thought he would be accepted because he had no idea what he was doing, but the teachers later told him that “Although you didn’t know any of the steps and you weren’t trained or anything, we just saw that you really wanted to do this” (Olstad). It is this eagerness

to learn, his determination and personality that made him the dancer and choreographer he is today.

After three years of high school with a ballet teacher who studied at the Royal Ballet Academy and a jazz teacher who studied in New York, Olstad got accepted in the National Academy of the Arts in Oslo, where he did a three-year bachelor's degree in jazz dance. It is in this school where Olstad met Siv Gaustad, who he calls "my teacher, my mentor" (Olstad). Gaustad is a Norwegian teacher who studied in Los Angeles between 1990-2000. For Jon Ole Olstad, she is one of the best dancers he knows and a fantastic teacher. He states that a lot of his own dancing and teaching comes from her: "She is definitely my biggest dance and teacher inspiration" (Olstad). Gaustad always taught evening and Saturday classes when Olstad studied with her, and he would always take these extra classes. Whenever he comes back to Oslo³ he takes her class and still feels strongly challenged by her. When Olstad watches her dance, he always gets very inspired: "She is very inspiring in her emotional approach to movement. Everything comes from the inside. Everything is about experiencing what you are doing" (Olstad). Besides the fact that her classes are very technical, she pays a lot of attention to having fun and creating a supportive energy in class. Her choreographies are about expressing yourself and she allows everyone in the studio to feel. Olstad tells about his friend and assistant Leslie Plummer, who took Gaustad's class in Oslo in 2020. She cried and stated that "that was just on another level" (Olstad). For Olstad, Gaustad was life changing: "She has the ability to change people's lives, if you are open to surrender yourself into that" (Olstad). It is this ability of changing people's lives I, and other dancers like Leslie Plummer, have experienced with Jon Ole Olstad. Plummer describes how taking Olstad's classes has taught her "that kind of surrendering into the emotions that hide in the movement, or tapping into your soul, and letting go completely" (Plummer). She calls it complete freedom, both as an artist and as a human being.

After graduating from the National Academy of the Arts in Oslo, Olstad was hired for the tour project Kamuyot in Sweden, which was a collaboration between the Swedish Riksteatern and the Israeli Batsheva Dance Company lead by Ohad Naharin. In 2013, he danced at Nederlands Dans Theater 1 and worked with, amongst others, Paul Lighfoot and Sol Leon, Johan Inger, Hofesh Shechter, Marco Goecke, Alexander Ekman, Jiri Kylian, Mehdi Walerski and Crystal Pite (Antakly). It was during these times when Olstad learned more about improvisation. Kamuyot, the piece from Naharin he danced in, was a piece that

³ Jon currently lives in Nürenberg, Germany.

had a lot of improvisation: “Improvisational solos and improvisational entrances. We did Gaga for like six months every day and then you had to improvise with tasks in the show” (Olstad). For him, the means of improvisation then changed from ‘free dancing’ to a way of researching what his body is capable of by performing imposed movement tasks.

Improvisation became a tool to discover new ways of moving his body, which contributed to creating his own movement signature.

“And we already knew the names”

In school, Jon Ole Olstad was rarely trained in improvisation nor in producing material. It was during his time with Ohad Naharin when he learned to improvise, started to choreograph and taught his first classes. After the Kamuyot tour, when dancing at Nederlands Dans Theater 1, he did not teach, but for SWITCH, NDT’s yearly event at which the dancers performed their own choreographies, Olstad created a solo called “And we already knew the names”.⁴ He did not choreograph it, but it was a full improvisation in which he responded to what he felt on the music and inside himself. For him, this solo was a way to find closure during a time of heartbreak after splitting up with the guy he had been together with for four years, his first love. Since their breakup, he had not looked at photos or videos of them together, but he wanted to do something with this, so he contacted his Norwegian mentor Siv Gaustad: “I told her ‘Siv, I have not looked at these videos since we broke up, but I want you to find one or two clips of Christopher and I want you to put those clips together and I want you to just cut it into a 20 second film’” (Olstad). This clip would later be projected during Olstad’s performance, without him having seen the video before. He thus exposed himself emotionally, letting the audience be part of his reaction on the re-watching of a personal video after months of heartbreak. To prepare his audience to him being vulnerable, he started asking them a couple of questions before the performance:

Raise your hand if you’re sitting next to a friend; raise your hand if you’re watching the show alone; raise your hand if you are sitting next to your boy- or girlfriend; raise your hand if you’re single; raise your hand if you want to have a relationship; raise

⁴ To watch the premiere of “And we already knew the names” by Jon Ole Olstad, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQj5h5sSXdg>.

your hand if you're married; raise your hand if you're divorced; raise your hand if you've ever been in love. (Olstad).

The last question Olstad asked, and the audience should answer by raising their hand at the end of his performance, was “Raise your hand if you've ever been in love with someone and that person ended up changing who you are as a person, but at the same time ended up breaking something inside you” (“And we already knew the names”). After this question, he asked a man from the audience to stand on stage, facing backward, during his performance, to symbolize the man he loved. By asking these personal questions, Olstad made the audience start to think about their own memories instead of the curtain going up, him being emotional, and then finish. The questions prepared the audience members to be vulnerable as well, which would help them to evoke their kinesthetic empathy for the dancer. Thinking about Olstad's questions made them aware of shared emotional experiences and pointed at an imaginative connection between the audience and Olstad. This is an example of the kinesthetic empathy Reason and Reynolds believed to be fueled by imaginative connections between ‘the self,’ which is understood as the audience or perceiver, and ‘the other,’ also known as the performer (Reason and Reynolds 71).

Going back to Olstad's own emotional experiences during the premiere of “And we already knew the names,” an interesting shift could be seen. Going through a heartbreak that was so strong he could not look at visual material of them together, nor talk about his ex, made him realize “I am brave in many things, but in this emotional thing, I am not brave” (Olstad). Nevertheless, he decided to expose himself in front of an audience, in an extremely vulnerable way, not knowing how he would physically and emotionally respond to the music and the unseen videos at that exact moment. He believes he had to do something extreme to get over something that was so painful: “I had to dance so emotional to get over it. It's like I had to inject myself so kinesthetically, so wrong, to be ok with it” (Olstad). Although Olstad himself says he was not brave in sharing his emotions, from an outsider's point of view he is. Going through something so emotionally painful one is not able to put into words, but then taking the step to expose oneself by looking at virtual memories and dancing out these hidden emotions can be seen as something extremely brave as well. It is this openness, not being afraid to be vulnerable around others, that characterizes Olstad in his dancing. It also defines his way of teaching, on which I elaborate later in this chapter.

With his improvisation during the performance, Olstad connected with his emotions and let his body tell what he could not say in words. He felt emotional and vulnerable, but

during the performance he also realized he was not that sad anymore. This was surprising for Olstad, because he thought he would have missed his ex more, but instead he started thinking about the good times they had, without feeling sad about it: “There is this moment during the end of the solo where I started laughing, because I started remembering good memories. (...) And then the video came on and I was like ‘Oh, there he is’ and then I thought ‘Ok that’s fine’” (Olstad). It is in these kinds of moments where dance can be seen as a form of therapy, in which the connection that is made between the body and emotions, causes a release of hidden feelings and makes room for new emotions. In an interview with Laura di Orio from *Dance Informa*, Olstad shares that for him, dance is “my home, it’s my biggest love, it’s my most vulnerable place of passion, it’s my therapist, it’s my place of creativity, growth and development” (Di Orio). This description shows how the physical practice of dance is important for Olstad in an emotional way. Just like the means of somatic therapy Eddy described, Olstad seeks for a way to get in touch with his emotions, that are in the case of his heartbreak, hidden emotions he would rather not talk about. His way to connect to these emotions and to let them come out, is dance. Plummer describes Olstad’s class as a catharsis (Plummer). Like Olstad himself, she too experienced how dance helped her to get past unspoken traumas that were stored in her body. Dancing Olstad’s choreographies helped her to find a place for these traumas. In her process of coping, Olstad was like a therapist, which shows the impact experiencing his choreographies can have on one’s mental health.

After the premiere, which helped Olstad to let go of his bottled-up emotions, he was asked to perform “And we already knew the names” in *Korzo* in The Hague for six nights in a row. He also performed it in 2015 at the International Solo Tanz Competition in Stuttgart, where he won the first prize for both dancer and choreographer, and as a reward he toured in Germany, Brazil and New York. Because he had to perform it so often, he also had moments where he did not have a strong emotional release but focused more on dancing beautifully. It was always improvised, and he kept challenging himself not to repeat everything he did the night before and for example do the exact opposite. He then told himself: “If you would go on the floor on that part of the music, today you’re not gonna go on the floor” (Olstad). Even though he would not always feel the emotions he had at the premiere, for audience members the kinesthetic experience stayed very emotional.

In 2016, Leslie Plummer watched Olstad perform “And we already knew the names” in New York. As an audience member she had a very powerful experience, connecting her own emotions to what Olstad expressed on stage. Olstad describes how she could not stop crying in his arms after the performance, because she was feeling so much and did not know

where all those feelings came from. In contrast to Martin's statement about how a kinesthetic experience of a perceiver actually is a projection of the dancer's feelings, Plummer's emotions were different from Olstad's sensations at that time. At that time, the performance was no longer a way for him to get over his feelings of heartbreak, but with his questions, the symbolization of his ex-lover by a random audience member and his vulnerable response to the music, the expression of a universal heartbreak narrative was still there. In his own words, Olstad would no longer speak of a kinesthetic experience in the present, but more of a kinesthetic memory. The first time he performed "And we already knew the names", he went through diverse emotional stages of heartbreak and realized he was okay with it, so the subsequent times he performed it, he remembered the sensations he had and went back to them as far as he was able to. These emotions thus became more of a memory.

Jon Ole Olstad as a choreographer and teacher

Jon Ole Olstad's career as a choreographer and teacher started to flourish when he moved to New York in 2015. Since he rarely produced material in school, he had to train making choreographies: "I would stand in the small hallway of my tiny apartment, trying to create material. So it was during those five years in New York, standing in the apartment, making material to very musical songs. I think that was the best training" (Olstad). In his choreographies, the music is the foundation. Olstad states that if he listens to the music, the music will tell him what to do. Whether it is instrumental music or a song with emotional lyrics, he tries to do with his body what the music is doing: "I try to become the music with my body" (Olstad). Besides, Olstad does not 'think' about which movement comes when, but he lets the movements come from within. His movements come from a feeling or sensation, which is then connected to the sensations he gets from listening to the music. This strong connection between the music and sensations that characterizes Olstad's choreographies, is inspired by Siv Gaustad's approach of dance. According to Jon Ole Olstad, she would make up her material on the spot in class by throwing her body into the movement and see where it goes, responding to the music. This gives her work an individuality, a uniqueness Olstad also possesses.

In his own words, Olstad says that his style or material is very much based on shared human feelings. When teaching class, he links his movements to these shared feelings, emotions that everyone is familiar with, like love or fear: "I think if you are open enough or willing enough to feel and sense all that, it can bring in the kinesthetic memory of that" (Olstad). In other words, for dancers, in order to have kinesthetic experiences in class or on

stage and to really feel the body and emotions connect, they have to dare to let go of being technically perfect to make space for spontaneous sensations. “Because my material is based on very spontaneous moments, and if you don’t tap into that spontaneous feeling, it’s almost like your kinesthetic awareness gets too slow and you’re not listening to it” (Olstad). Leslie Plummer confirms the necessity for dancers to be open and vulnerable in Olstad’s class. She noticed how many people after taking Olstad’s class once did not come back, because they were not willing to tap into his vulnerability and thought it was way too intense: “They just wanted to come and take a dance class and move and look good doing it ... Not to be always challenged” (Plummer). Both Olstad and Plummer point out the importance of daring to be vulnerable in class in order to experience emotional release and that this is not something that comes naturally for everybody.

Jon Ole Olstad firstly gained kinesthetic awareness by a workshop in college with a life coach where they would stand in duos facing each other and complimenting or criticizing each other. He noticed that when telling his partner how beautiful or strong he or she was, their body would react by opening up their chest and standing taller. When saying ‘you are ugly’, they would stand less tall and become more introverted. It took Olstad a couple of years to understand the impact of this exercise, when he realized that “dance is just a very extravagant form of body language” (Olstad). He brings natural body language that everyone does into his choreographies and brings more ‘dance’ into it. Olstad links common human feelings to this body language and lets the body express these feelings in a bigger way on the music. There is thus a strong connection between the body and emotions in Jon Ole Olstad’s choreographies.

The importance of this connection became more apparent for Olstad when he started doing Gyrokinesis®, a movement method that connects movements, breathing and mental focus: “The Gyrokinesis Method is a movement method that addresses the entire body, opening energy pathways, stimulating the nervous system, increasing range of motion, and creating functional strength through rhythmic, flowing movement sequences” (*Gyrotonic*). Through this method, Olstad learned you have to feel and experience what you are doing, instead of only doing certain movements. Gyrokinesis taught him about what you are actually feeling when you are doing something, and this contributes to kinesthetic experiences while dancing. Movements thus gain a deeper layer than being ‘just a movement’. Because of his teacher training in Gyrokinesis, Olstad became more acquainted with expressing movement sensations in words, which is something he does in his dance classes as well.

Although the connection between common human feelings and natural body language characterizes all Olstad's work, there is a difference between his choreographies on stage and in class. When choreographing for stage, important aspects are the aesthetics and the visual appearance of the piece. There are a lot of creative choices made about, among others, the group composition of the dancers and the scenography, because the perception of the audience plays an important role. In class, these aspects are unimportant, and it is all about the sensational appearance of the dancers. Next to the educational purpose of classes, for Olstad, another important purpose is the joy of being in class. As a teacher, he attaches great importance to creating a safe space in class, a space where dancers dare to be vulnerable, make mistakes and let go. He always tells his students: "Don't plan what you're going to do. Do the steps, but don't plan how you're going to do them, be in the moment" (Olstad). In order to give students the sense of this safe space, Olstad himself needs to open up and fully give himself in everything he does. And when a student is open to give everything in the moment, that is when kinesthetic experiences resulting in emotional release come up.

For Leslie Plummer, who has had a lot of kinesthetic experiences in Olstad's classes, it is always a surprise what will happen: "Everytime I go into that class and he starts the music and he's like 'and raise your arms up', I'm like 'oh here we go', like what's gonna happen now?" (Plummer). She always tries to be as present as she can in her body, mind and soul, which can result in a release of every kind of emotion, varying from anger to grief and happiness. Jon Ole Olstad experienced a strong emotional release himself in a class with Malaya Ho in Stockholm, when she only said 'This is about memories': "When I was dancing, suddenly I thought about a person that I was in love with like five years ago. And I started crying inside myself and I was like 'That was really strange, where did that come from?'" (Olstad). It was a combination of her words, him being in that moment with the song, what made it a collision of physicality, Olstad's mental space at that time and memories. It is these moments of emotional release with no concrete reason that make dance such an intriguing art form.

This emotional release caused by a kinesthetic connection between a dancer and a teacher can happen only when they are both open to emotionally expose themselves in the safe space of the studio and, in other words, dare to be vulnerable. If a teacher presents himself as vulnerable, then dancers feel invited to be vulnerable as well and they can get to the deeper layer of a choreography: the layer that is not about which movements are done when, but about the sensation behind the movements. When a teacher performs the choreography in class to show these sensations, the dancers who are open to this deeper layer

will perceive the sensations and gain kinesthetic empathy for the teacher. Olstad thinks however, that there is a thin line between a teacher performing in class to demonstrate his movement sensations to the students or a teacher showing off: “You have so many teachers that make the class all about them, like they want the students to be an audience. They use a normal dance class, a studio, as a theatrical platform for them to show their dance” (Olstad). This is something that happens if a teacher is not truly passionate about teaching students, but actually still wants to be more on stage him- or herself. The class is not about the students, but about the teacher. In the last case, when a teacher asks the dancers to sit around him or her in a circle and watch, there can still be a kinesthetic experience. The difference is, however, that in this case the dancers perceive the teacher as audience members. In the case of a teacher demonstrating movement sensations, the kinesthetic experience goes deeper and dancers get the chance to connect the kinesthetic empathy they developed for the teacher with their own inner sensations when they dance it themselves. According to Olstad, this is what happens when dancers experience an emotional release in his class.

As a dancer and choreographer, Jon Ole Olstad attaches a great value to openness and vulnerability among dancers and their teacher. Inspired by his mentor and college teacher Siv Gaustad, Olstad always aims to create a safe space in class, where it is okay to fall and make mistakes and dancers are challenged to fully surrender to the choreography. His movements are created as a response to what he feels on the music, so a lot of his personal feelings can be seen and experienced in his choreographies. When dancers in class are open for Olstad’s vulnerability and surrendering, kinesthetic experiences can be evoked that cause an emotional release. An example of a dancer who has experienced a lot of emotional releases is Leslie Plummer. She describes Olstad’s classes as a catharsis and a form of therapy to get past traumas. I have experienced this catharsis as well. In the next chapter, I analyze class videos in which this happened to me, to see what it is in his choreographies that causes this emotional release.

Chapter 3

Emotional release in Jon Ole Olstad's choreographies

In this final chapter, the analysis of videos in which I dance in Jon Ole Olstad's classes are central. To motivate the tools I use in analyzing dance through video recordings, I first outline dance-analysis related research on which I base my self-composed dance analysis method. This method is strongly influenced by the emphasis Shantel Ehrenberg puts on the voice of dancers in analyzing their kinesthetic experiences through video material. Together with the main factors of Laban Movement Analysis, Ehrenberg's findings form the foundation for the self-composed method I use for the analyses of my video recordings.

I analyze four videos, each from another week when I danced with Jon Ole Olstad. They all took place between February 2018 and November 2019. In the analysis, I make a distinction between my movement qualities, emotional expression and internal sensations, and Jon Ole Olstad's behavior. The role of the music comes back within all these aspects. In order to find out, not only in one choreography in particular, but also in general, what it is in Jon Ole Olstad's classes that causes an emotional release, I eventually combine the four analyses to find a common thread. I do so on the basis of the following research question: 'How do choreographies by Jon Ole Olstad cause a release of emotions among dancers?'

Dance analysis: from other methods to my own method

Dance analyses take many different forms. As earlier stated by Martin, dance is an art form "to express all kinds of emotional experiences" (Martin 8). Because emotional experiences are often difficult to express in words, they are expressed through the body, in dance. The absence of a definite or clear vocabulary has the consequence that there is no comprehensive method for dance analysis nor for dance notation. There are, however, many dance scholars who aimed to find an analysis method to get to the heart of a choreography or find a method to notate the movement intentions.

A widely known pioneer in the field of dance analysis is Rudolf Laban. In the first half of the twentieth century, Laban developed his own methods of dance analysis and notation, which are called *Laban Movement Analysis (LMA)* and *Labanotation*. He analyzed movements on the basis of the three 'motion factors' *weight*, *space* and *time* and looked at their natural *flow*. Laban focused on "the sense of having a bodily feeling of them, or whether they fight against one or more of these factors by actively resisting them" (Laban 20). In his

movement analyses he thus investigated where the weight of the body goes, how the body moves through space and in which directions, what the speed or duration of the movements is and to what sense the flow of the body comes naturally or is resisted. At the same time, he took into account the *effort* of the movements, which he described as “the inner impulses from which movement originates” (Laban 9). This origin of a movement can be something that happens consciously or in an unconscious way. In his analysis method, Laban also considered the influence of the music on the motion factors and on the sense of flow and effort. In his method, I think that Laban included the most important factors for the analysis of a dance choreography. Therefore, in my movement analysis of the choreographies by Jon Ole Olstad, I focus on his three motion factors weight, space and time and also take flow, effort and the influence of the music into account.

The emergence of digital media, which happened years after Laban’s development of *Labanotation* and *LMA*, has caused more dance analysis methods to develop. In collaboration with an interdisciplinary team with knowledge in amongst others dance practice, (Laban)notation, computer technology, film making, interactive media, Pieter C. Scholten and Emio Greco (EG|PC), the directors of ICK Dans Amsterdam, in 2007 aimed to analyze their *Double Skin/Double Mind* moving method. They tried to find a notation system to capture the intention and internal qualities of their movements (*Capturing Intention* 7). Bertha Bermúdez, who collaborated in this project, described their goal as “trying to describe the indescribable” (*Capturing Intention* 41). They did not find the system, analysis, documentation nor notation method, but their attempt is valuable for the development of digital documentation and analysis methods. No matter how accurate a digital registration is, it is still not possible to detect everything, like internal sensations connected to movements which are invisible for spectators. *Capturing Intention* made me as a researcher aware of the fact that there is not one specific format for dance analysis, which encourages me to adapt different analysis methods together into one that helps me to find the aspects in Jon Ole Olstad’s choreographies causing an emotional release among dancers.

The invisible, internal sensations EG|PC tried to capture, are in fact the kinesthetic experiences of the dancers. In contrast to EG|PC, who aimed to have this intention captured by outsiders like a videographer or annotator, dance scholar Shantel Ehrenberg noticed the importance of the dancer’s voice in this. In “A Contemporary Dancer’s Kinesthetic Experiences With Dancing Self-images”, she conducted interviews with dancers and let them talk about their kinesthetic experiences after showing them video-recordings of themselves while dancing a certain choreography. In that way, essential aspects of a choreography that

were not seen in a visual documentation could be notated because of what a dancer kinesthetically remembered feeling (Ehrenberg 195). Next to inner sensations, a dancer's description of his or her kinesthetic memories can also bring characteristics of a choreographer's work or teaching to the forefront that are helpful in retaining or understanding the essence of it (Ehrenberg 201). It is in line with these statements that my kinesthetic memories are valuable in the analysis of Jon Ole Olstad's choreographies.

Another dance scholar who, like Ehrenberg, stated that a dancer's perspective on these videos is of value for the deeper understanding of a choreography, is Heather Young Reed. She does not believe that a video recording can capture the kinesthetic sensation behind movements. Reed suggested that "video is capable of recording visual cues that, when seen, activate a memory of a kinetic experience" (Reed 236). The role of the dancer is then to put these kinesthetic memories into words, which is what I do in my analysis as well. I use my video recordings as a means to get back to the kinesthetic experiences I had in Jon Ole Olstad's classes.

EG|PC, Ehrenberg and Reed in their dance analyses all paid attention to not only the physical aspects of dance, but also to the role of the mind. In *Beyond Words: Movement Observation and Analysis*, a book in which Carol-Lynn Moore and Kaoru Yamamoto covered different methods of movement analysis, they pointed at the importance of both aspects in an analysis of movement. As stated in Chapter 1, there is a strong connection between the body and emotions and they have an impact on each other, so they should both be analyzed for a proper analysis. Although scholars like Laban already noticed the importance of both aspects, Moore and Yamamoto stated that over the years this has surely not been taken for granted: "Anatomical and physiological functions have been studied in isolation from the mental and emotional aspects of movement behavior" (Moore and Yamamoto 215). In my dance analysis, all these aspects come to the fore.

The dance analysis method I use is a combination of the earlier mentioned analysis methods. Firstly, I analyze the choreography and the movement qualities I use as a dancer. In this part of the analysis, I take the three motion factors weight, space and time, and flow and effort in account, that are used in Laban Movement Analysis. I do, however, not only focus on the physical, but also on my emotional expression and internal sensations, which are respectively based on what is visible on the videos and my kinesthetic memories after watching them. The third part is an analysis of Jon Ole Olstad's behavior in class. I mainly focus on how he verbally gives directions for the movement quality and musicality of the choreography and to what extent he responds to what he perceives. A final important aspect in

my analysis is the role of the music. I do not discuss the music separately, but as something that is woven into the other aspects. The musicality can namely be seen in the movement analysis, since the music is the foundation for Olstad's choreographies (Olstad). The music also plays a role in the kinesthetic experience of a dancer, and it is what the choreographer responds to while teaching. In the next paragraphs, an analysis of my movement qualities, my internal sensations and visual expressions, Jon Ole Olstad's behavior in class and the role of the music come to the fore for each of the four video recordings. Because I expect that the emotional release is triggered by a combination of the movements, music and teacher; I do not analyze them separately but in an intertwined way.

Silhouette: Stockholm, February 2018

In this first week of taking classes with Jon Ole Olstad, *Silhouette* was the third choreography I learned. I remember being open, throwing myself into his class in a way I had not danced before. In the previous two classes I was a lot in my head, trying to be perfect and to copy Olstad's movements as good as possible. During the third class, I was able to let that go and 'just dance'. In the warm-up, Olstad told the students to 'open your heart', which is something that has always stayed with me. I danced with an open heart and after class I went to him to thank him, but all I could do was cry. No words came out, which was, I thought at that time, not like me at all. I would almost never cry, and especially not in public among people I had only just met. Looking back, this was the first time I had such a strong emotional release in dance.

The moment my body and emotions connected into a kinesthetic experience is in the beginning of the choreography. Right before the start I take a deep breath, while focusing on the mirror, as if I am telling myself to go for it. I step out, dividing my weight in a wide position, to reach my arms resistantly in a long circle from side to front, while still focusing on myself in the mirror. The speed of the subsequent hand movements depends on the rhythm of the lyrics. During the arabesque, Olstad shouts 'Go, go, go, go, go!', while the music builds up to a climax. From that point I lose my reflection in the mirror and throw my body into the successive arches and collapses. These movements and the waving arms that follow in a natural flow, start from a soft sensation in the chest. The rest of the body responds to this effort. The wavy flow is broken down by fast ball changes, which Olstad highlights by clapping to the rhythm of the piano. These ball changes and the *ronde jambe* turn provide a shifting in weight and space. The musical and choreographic climax ends with the lift of the left leg while the upper body arches. Olstad intensifies this climax by shouting 'Whoooo'

(Fig. 1). After the climax, the movements become smaller in terms of weight shifting and transitions and they follow up one another faster on the lyrics. I notice myself being focused on the mirror again and more in my head. This might have to do with the fact that in the beginning of the video, before the choreography starts, Olstad repeats this specific section while standing in front of me and I wanted to check if my movements were correct. After this section, I improvise with a turn and a head circle, which shows how I am still able to let go in my movements.



Fig. 1: I lift my left leg and arch my upper body on the musical climax, while Olstad shouts 'Whoooo'.⁵

As can be seen in the analysis above, the emotional release is caused by a combination of different factors. I mainly connect to my inner feelings if I let go of my reflection and focus on the sensation instead of the visualization of my movements. In this part of the analysis, I rely on my kinesthetic memories, like the dancers in Ehrenberg's research do as well. When focusing more on the choreography and taking Laban's factors of natural flow and effort into account, one can see that when the music builds up to a climax, Olstad's movements get more intense as well in terms of reaching and collapsing. He intensifies this musical and choreographic climax vocally by screaming and commenting and I respond by throwing my body into an improvised turn.

Öldurót: Castellana Grotte, July 2018

⁵ Still from "2018-02-28: Silhouette by Jon Ole Olstad @ Stockholm".

The second week I took Olstad's classes was during an international dance festival in Italy, where we would work on the same choreography for five days and eventually perform it on stage. Olstad taught a workshop for teens and a workshop for adults each day, and although I was supposed to only take the adult classes, I asked the organization for permission to take the teen classes as well, where Olstad taught *Öldurót*. After the strong kinesthetic experiences I had in Stockholm a few months earlier, I wanted to dive into his style as much as possible. During these workshops, the emotional release I experienced in Stockholm happened as well. I met Leslie Plummer, Olstad's dear friend and assistant, with whom I connected emotionally. After class, we would embrace each other and cry with no apparent reason. It is these kinds of emotional, kinesthetic experiences that make Olstad's classes such an intriguing research topic.

Unlike the other choreographies I analyze, *Öldurót* is a choreography on an instrumental song. I remember trying to embody the vibrations of the violin with my arms and upper body, which happens throughout the whole choreography. The kinesthetic memories I have, in which I connected with my body and emotions through the music, happened in the moments of collapsing, or more specifically in the transition of 'being in control' to surrendering. There are two collapses on the floor in this choreography, which are both preceded by an extreme lengthening in the upper body and arms to make the surrendering to gravity even stronger. The musicality in this choreography is very present and brings a big contrast between two kinds of movement qualities: on the one hand, linked to the violin, there are long, lengthened legs and arms, and wide steps with, in terms of Laban's motion factors, a lot of shifts in weight. These movements are driven by a conscious push I am giving my body to go to its limits. On the other hand, linked to the piano beats, there are sudden collapses of the just stretched out body, in which I am not in control, but the piano controls me. I surrender my body to gravity and let it flow naturally after collapsing (Fig. 2). Olstad verbally encourages dancers to let go and surrender by exclamations like 'Go!' and 'Fall!'. What stands out, is that there are no moments in this choreography where I am focused on my reflection in the mirror. This shows that I am not concerned with the visualization of my movements, but mainly with the sensation of it.



Fig. 2: I surrender my body to gravity on the beat of the piano.⁶

Sensing the transition of ‘controlling one’s body’ to ‘letting go and see how one’s body will get on the floor and come back up’ is what causes kinesthetic experiences in this choreography. The musicality of the choreography plays an essential role. However, as Olstad stated in our interview, if a dancer does not dare to let go of bodily control, it is unlikely to have a kinesthetic experience after all (Olstad). In this choreography the emotional release, which did not result in crying but in feeling good about the capabilities of my body, is mainly caused by the surrendering connection I make with the music.

Do What You Have To Do: Stockholm, January 2019

The third time I took Olstad’s classes was in Stockholm again, where he taught two classes a day for a week. Leslie Plummer was there as well. We would learn a new choreography every class, except for *Do What You Have To Do*. Olstad first taught this choreography in an evening class, and again the morning after. Just like the other times I took his classes, I was there by myself without any company, to absorb anything I could. I believe that because I was there alone, it was easier to open myself up and be vulnerable, since I did not know anybody, and nobody knew me. I was thus not aware of the other people in the studio, except for the teacher. I remember being very emotional that week, not only in class, where Leslie Plummer and I would feel connected through Olstad’s choreographies again, but also outside of class. I would repeat the choreographies over and over in my head while being in my hotel room, and

⁶ Still from “2018-07-19: Öldurót by Jon Ole Olstad @ Castellana Grotte”.

again sense emotions coming up that made me cry. Even through my kinesthetic memories I was able to get an emotional release.

While dancing *Do What You Have To Do* in the second class, I noticed there were moments where I would close my eyes. This can be explained by the fact that I already knew the choreography and thus did not have to see everything around me. However, I also believe that closing my eyes is a sign of me being focused on my inner sensations instead of the visualization of my movements. This is an extension of no longer focusing on my reflection in the mirror. Although there are a couple of other moments in this choreography where I close my eyes, I only analyze the moment where my eyes are shut for the longest time. This happens during the climax of the song, where Sarah McLachlan hits some high notes and the piano speeds up. After Olstad screams ‘And go!’ I quickly go to the floor over my insteps, through a split and a backwards rolover to end on my knees. As Laban would define it, the movements naturally flow into each other, while I let gravity take over control. After that, my arms hit all the notes of the piano in a soft but strong way, to finish the section with another head roll forward. At the same time, during this climax, I hear Plummer scream ‘Whoooo’ (Fig. 3). This makes the climax even more intense, just like the fact that I unconsciously bit my shirt at the same time. It is a moment of being in the flow of the choreography, not being aware of the space in a virtual but still in a kinesthetic and auditory way.



Fig. 3: I strongly hit the notes of the piano with my arms, while Plummer screams 'Whoooo'.⁷

⁷ Still from “2019-01-30: Do What You Have To Do by Jon Ole Olstad @ Stockholm”.

In *Do What You Have To Do*, I experienced an emotional release during the musical climax which was choreographed as an ongoing floor part. My eyes were shut, which deepened the connection with my inner sensations. I could hear the intensity of the singer and the piano and although I did not see what was happening, I could hear the excitement of Plummer in her voice. Being on the one hand visually unaware made my kinesthetic awareness, on the other hand, stronger. By shutting my eyes, I expanded the kinesthetic experiences that were already evoked by the musicality and flow of Olstad's choreography and the way he vocally responded to what he saw. To analyze this, it was necessary to involve my kinesthetic experiences as a dancer, just like Ehrenberg did in her interviews with other dancers.

A Song For You: London, November 2019

During the fourth and so far last week of taking Olstad's classes, the last choreography I learned was *A Song For You*. Somehow, before traveling to London, I felt in my guts that I had to go there because I was not sure when the next possibility to dance with Olstad would be. Unfortunately, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, this has so far been the last time I took Olstad's class live. It was only three classes and I remember being frustrated after the second class because I tried to be perfect and was more in my head instead of trying to let go. Walking into this last class, I decided to surrender, absorb everything and just be thankful for being there.

Right before dancing the choreography one last time, Olstad said 'For yourself'. It hit me. I closed my eyes and kept them shut throughout the whole choreography. I already had a kinesthetic experience in the beginning of the choreography. Olstad's choreography again strongly connects with the musicality of the song. Every arm, every gesture, every step is connected to Donny Hathaway's voice or the piano and the timing of the movements is just as diverse as the musicality. The movements are initiated from the heart or chest and the arms. From diving into an arch and throwing the arms five times on Hathaway's voice to collapsing on the floor on the piano, an interesting connection between the music and the choreography can be seen. On Hathaway's voice, the movements are mostly lengthening, moving through space and throwing arms, while still being in control. The piano stands for collapsing and letting go of the body. The variety between these two dynamics of pushing and letting go causes an emotional release, which is present during the whole choreography. At the end, still having my eyes closed and only focusing on my inner sensation of the movements but not on the space around me, I roll into another dancer (Fig. 4). I remember us both experiencing this

as something normal, with no need to say sorry for bumping into each other. Our kinesthetic sense took over the visual sense and although our contact was not planned, we went with it.



Fig. 4: Another dancer and I roll into each other with our eyes closed.⁸

The analysis of *A Song For You* shows what happens if the visual sense is completely eliminated and how two words can have an impact on the emotional release of a dancer. After hearing the words ‘For yourself,’ my body and emotions connected, resulting in a kinesthetic experience. The variation in movement qualities of controlling the body to surrendering intensifies this release. The weight shifting and challenging or going with the natural flow that are central in Laban’s Movement Analysis come back in this variation.

Emotional release in Jon Ole Olstad’s choreographies

When comparing the four analyses, a couple of similarities can be found. First of all, the movement quality of Olstad’s choreographies is clearly recognizable. Within the different qualities, two of them stand out: a lengthening in the arms and upper body, which is about being in control and pushing the boundaries of the body, versus collapsing and letting go, in which gravity takes control. Because of the fast shifts between these two qualities, emotional release can take place, which happens in *Silhouette* and *A Song For You* in similar ways.

Whether an emotional release is evoked, also depends on the use of the music. In Jon Ole Olstad’s choreographies, the music forms the foundation for, and a source of inspiration for the movements. Olstad even states that when listening, the music will tell him what to do (Olstad). The earlier stated movement qualities are connected to the dynamics of the music. On the instrumental song *Öldurót* the distinction is made between controlled movements on

⁸ Still from “2019-11-18: A Song For You by Jon Ole Olstad @ London”.

the violin and releases on the piano. In *A Song For You* the same thing happens, although the violin is replaced by the voice of Donny Hathaway.

Jon Ole Olstad's behavior in class has a huge impact on the kinesthetic empathy of students for him, which can free up the floor for a release of emotions. As stated in the interview, Olstad aims to create a safe space in class: a space in which he as a teacher is open and vulnerable and invites students to do the same (Olstad). By encouraging dancers with sentences like 'Open your heart', which he said during the warm-up of *Silhouette*, or 'For yourself' right before a choreography starts, like with *A Song For You*, Olstad can make a difference in the kinesthetic experiences of a dancer. Exclamations like 'Whoooo' or other cries of excitement during a choreography can also encourage dancers to keep going, opening up and pushing themselves.

Lastly, the way a dancer feels and behaves in class impacts to what extent an emotional release can happen. If dancers are focused on being perfect and look at their reflection in the mirror, they will be more in their heads and less in their bodies, like I experienced in the class before *A Song For You* or at some points during the choreography of *Silhouette*. Closing one's eyes is a sign of trusting oneself and one's body enough to surrender to the movements, daring to lose the visual sense and focus on inner sensations. Looking at my analyses, a chronological development in this trust can be found. *Silhouette* contained parts of daring to let go of the visual aspect, but also moments of focus in the mirror. With *Öldurót* I no longer focused on the mirror, but my eyes were always open. *Do What You Have To Do* contained moments of shutting my eyes, but also moments when they were open. During *A Song For You*, my eyes were closed the whole time. It is this surrendering that, according to Olstad, is terrifying for many dancers, but essential to fully experience the intention of his work (Olstad).

When trying to find aspects in Jon Ole Olstad's choreographies that cause an emotional release among dancers, there are no clear one-sided answers. The emotional release is evoked by an alternation of lengthening and collapsing movements, the musicality of the choreography, comments by the choreographer and an openness of the dancer to experience inner sensations. If a dancer is open for surrendering to the movements, the music and the vision of Olstad on dance, he or she can connect kinesthetically and experience emotional release. As stated in the interview, Olstad's choreographies respond to what he feels on the music and come from shared human feelings. He sees dance as an extravagant form of body language and he aims to create a safe space for dancers to express themselves and surrender in his movements (Olstad). This all clearly comes to the fore in the big shifts in his movement

qualities, the way he presents himself as a teacher and approaches the students. For me, this openness goes beyond a dance class, which encouraged me to share my analyses with Olstad before finishing my research. He approved my statements and told me that my accurate analyses of his work made him feel humbled.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I investigated how dancing a choreography by Jon Ole Olstad can stir up kinesthetic experiences that cause an emotional release among dancers, specifically in a dance class. To do so, in Chapter 1, I defined the phenomena of kinesthesia and emotions in dance. Dance can be seen as a kinesthetic art form. While moving the body, the parts of the brain that regulate emotions are activated. This explains the strong connection between a dancer's body and emotions, also known as the sixth sense of kinesthesia, which Gibson described as "a muscular connection to inner feelings" (Foster 117). Because of this connection, dancing a choreography can stir up an emotional release in a dancer. This emotional release is something that I and other dancers experience often while dancing a choreography by Jon Ole Olstad in class.

To find characteristics in Olstad's work that evoke kinesthetic experiences, I conducted an in-depth interview with him to get to the heart of his work in Chapter 2. Olstad is a Norwegian contemporary choreographer who connects his movements to shared human feelings. In his classes, he presents himself vulnerably in front of his students, creating a safe space for them to be open and vulnerable with him. By making comments like 'For yourself' and 'Open your heart', like he did in the videos of *Silhouette* and *A Song For You* I analyzed in Chapter 3, he opens the floor for a dancer's emotions even more. Olstad's vulnerability as a teacher causes kinesthetic empathy among dancers in his class who are willing to let go of 'being perfect' in their movements and to experience the sensation behind the movements. Because of these sensations, also known as kinesthetic experiences, a dancer can get an emotional release while dancing. Leslie Plummer, Olstad's assistant, describes this emotional release as a catharsis.

In Chapter 3 I analyzed four videos of myself in Olstad's class, to eventually find a common thread within these videos that causes an emotional release. I focused on Olstad's choreographies and their connection with the music, my movement qualities and sensations and Olstad's behavior as a teacher in class. I created my own analysis method, inspired by Laban's Movement Analysis method and Ehrenberg's research method in which the kinesthetic memories of dancers play an important role. Reflecting on the common thread in my analyses, I noticed a development in my daring to let go when I looked at my analyses in chronological order. In *Silhouette* I had my first kinesthetic experiences causing an emotional release when I stopped focusing on my reflection and involved my head in the way

movements of Olstad's choreography. In *Öldurót* I did not focus on the mirror at all. In *Do What You Have To Do* I started closing my eyes at some points, to eventually keep them shut throughout the whole choreography of *A Song For You*. Within this development, the emotional release developed stronger as well. By eliminating the visual sense, the focus on movement sensations increased, which activated the kinesthetic sense. This shows the effect of closing one's eyes on kinesthetic experiences causing an emotional release.

Another aspect in Olstad's choreographies that plays an important role in causing an emotional release, is the big and frequent variation of at least two apparent movement qualities. On the one hand there are long, lengthening movements with far stretched arms, legs and upper body. These movements contain a lot of weight shifts, move through space and are initiated by the upper body and arms. The dancer controls the body and pushes it to its limits. In the other characterizing movement quality, the dancer lets go and gravity takes over control. This quality can be found in collapses and throws of the body, which come from a natural flow. The variation between these two apparent movement qualities is strongly connected to the music. Olstad's controlled, lengthened arms and upper body movements, for example, respond to the strings of a violin, while the sudden beats of a piano or drum cause a collapse to the floor. When the music builds up to a climax, the choreography becomes more intense as well. This build-up of movements and music, often accompanied with Olstad's exclamations and comments like 'Go, go, go, go, go!' or 'Fall!' lead to a release of emotions among the dancers.

In doing research on the cause of emotional release among dancers while dancing a choreography by Jon Ole Olstad, it should be noticed that there is no universal answer. There are personal and cultural differences between dancers that play a role. Every dancer has a different personality and way of taking classes, which impacts to what sense kinesthetic experiences will be evoked to cause a release of emotions or not. Although the open and vulnerable way Olstad presents himself in his classes, and the musicality and variation of movement qualities that characterizes his choreographies can already stir up kinesthetic experiences for his students, an emotional release can only be caused if a dancer is willing and daring to open him- or herself up and be vulnerable as well. In order to release emotions in dance, a dancer needs to let go of everything else and surrender in the movements.

The conclusions I draw in my research are based on my personal videos and experiences. Because I analyzed myself, I was able to rely on kinesthetic memories and embodied knowledge I have from dancing Olstad's choreographies. Movement sensations that might be unnoticeable for an outside eye, could be noticed because I experienced them. I

remember how I felt in Olstad's classes and what I was going through in my personal life that could have impacted my dancing. The awareness of these aspects contributes to the extent to which the emotional release can be declared. However, it is important to state that because of my personal involvement it is difficult to analyze the videos in a more objective way. My kinesthetic memories are inseparably linked to the analysis of the choreography, the music and Olstad as a teacher. In dance analyses with other purposes this can be a downside, but in my research the interweaving of memories and experiences in the whole analysis is contributing. The movement sensations of dancers and the open and vulnerable position they take in class, play an important role in their emotional release and need to be put into words by the dancers themselves.

To further expand my research and to go beyond my own experiences, a next step would be to analyze videos from other dancers. However, this would not be possible without their collaboration. The analysis of the movements, music and Olstad's behavior could be done by me, but when it comes to analyzing movement sensations and kinesthetic memories, the dancer's own descriptions are necessary because these memories and experiences cannot be seen from an outside eye.

Although my thesis focused on Jon Ole Olstad's choreographies specifically, it is of great importance in the field of dance studies in research on kinesthetic experiences of dancers. Dancers contain a lot of embodied knowledge that has not been taken into account very often. Because most of the scholars are not dancers themselves they analyze other dancers, but without giving these dancers an active voice in the analysis. This results in a lack of knowledge about the intention behind and the sensation of movements, which play an important role in kinesthesia. The same knowledge is also important in research on how emotional release is caused in dance, not only in Jon Ole Olstad's choreographies in particular, but also for other choreographers. Dancing impacts the wellbeing of people and sharing dancers' experiences can contribute to the knowledge in the field of somatics. Additionally, my research shows the importance of the position a dancer takes in class for their personal dance experience and the role a teacher plays in this. This knowledge is beneficial for teachers and dancers to be aware of, since it impacts the development of a dancer. My thesis is thus not only relevant in the academic field of dance research, but also for dancers and dance teachers in practice. I hope that my research contributes to a research field in which the voice of dancers will play a more important role. Dancers have a lot to say, not only with their bodies but also in words, and it would be beneficial for the field of dance studies if they could share their knowledge more.

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¹⁰ A transcription can be found in Appendix 1.

¹¹ A partial transcription can be found in Appendix 2.

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Appendix 1

Interview with Jon Ole Olstad – 9 May 2021

Could you first give a short introduction about what/who moved you to start dancing in the first place and who were your biggest inspirations as a dancer along the way?

“So I started dancing, since I come from a very small city where there were like a very few dance courses when somebody came there and taught for like a week, when I did an amateur dance performance. Cause in the city where I lived they did a small amateur musical every year where you had to be 15 to participate. So when I was 15 I did that and then there were some other teenagers from another city and they went to like a performing arts high school. So in Norway in high school you can select what you want to do and one of the departments you can select is de dance drama department, but that school was like 2,5 hours away from where I lived by car so... I really liked doing this musical, I really liked dancing and I think this is something that I really want to do. So I did the audition there when I was 15 and you know I had never taken ballet before, never taken jazz and the audition was like ballet and some jazz. And I had never done any of that and I was like ‘what is this?’ and I never thought that I would be accepted. The teachers later told me that ‘although you didn’t know any of the steps and you weren’t trained or anything, we just saw that you really wanted to do this’. So from when I was 16 I did 3 years of department high school, but it wasn’t a lot of dance classes. I think in the first year we did 3 dance classes, the second year 6 and the last year 9 classes a week. We had a very good ballet teacher who had studied at the Royal Ballet and then we had a fantastic jazz teacher from Norway who had studied a lot in New York. She was a really really good jazz teacher. Yeah, the teachers were great. So you know, these 3 years I really pushed, I really worked hard and I kept realizing this is something I really want to do.

And then after that I got accepted in the National Academy of the Arts in Oslo, which is like the highest education for dance in Norway. They have a bachelor degree in jazz dance and contemporary dance and ballet, and I did a 3 year bachelor in jazz dance. This was like a full education, which was very good: very good school, very good teachers. And that’s where I met the teacher that I call ‘my teacher’, my mentor. Her name is Siv Gaustad. She is a Norwegian teacher, but she studied a lot in Los Angeles in the ’90-early 2000. She is for me one of the best dancers I know, a fantastic teacher and so much from my dancing and teaching comes from her. I can send you some videos from her and you can see that I am hugely influenced by her. The way she dances and the way she teaches and the structure of her warm-up. Because she was my jazz teacher in my second year of college and the National Academy of the Arts, but she was always teaching evening classes or Saturday classes and I would always take class with her. And still, whenever I go back to Oslo I take class with her. So she is definitely my biggest dance and teach inspiration, yeah. She doesn’t choreograph so much, but all of that other stuff, she is the main one.”

Could you explain why?

“I think it has a lot to do with why for example you and Leslie enjoy taking class from me. She is a fantastic dance inspiration, so I get very inspired in seeing her dance. She is very inspiring in her emotional approach to movement. Everything comes from the inside. Everything is about experiencing what you are doing. It’s very technical, very strong work. I mean I started training with her in 2006 and now, if I took a class with her tomorrow, which is

over 15 years later, I still find it so difficult, like so challenging. It never gets easier, of course it gets easier, but there is still so much to investigate all the time. She allows everyone in the studio to feel. It's about expressing, it's about experiencing what you are doing. It's a lot about having fun. It's a lot about creating that really supportive energy. Maybe a little like how we felt when you took my class in Italy. You know, like everyone is there to like 'popow' each other. And we are also very close friends."

"When Leslie came to Sweden last year, she took her class and Leslie was crying and she was like 'Oh my god, holy fuck that was just on another level'. Carlos took her class. She has the ability to change people's lives. If you are open to surrender yourself into that. To me she was live changing."

How/when did you start making your own choreographies? What inspires you as a choreographer?

"I think I have a video on YouTube from the first time I had to make a combo when I started teaching. I will send you that video and I think you will be like 'Oh wow'. You know, it's changed a lot. In my training we almost did no improvisation. We rarely had to produce material. We always got material, choreography, combos. We never had to make a student piece so we were never so trained in that. So I remember, I started teaching when I worked with Ohad Naharin some open classes. And oh my god, those early choreographies are quite bad, but they were bad because I hadn't trained. I believe making material, you have to train. You have to train in making, in understanding how your body wants to move. So when I first started, it could take me several days making movements. So I started teaching a little bit. Then when I was at NDT I didn't teach anything but I got to know many different styles. And it was when I moved to America that I really started teaching. And that's when I taught maybe 9 open classes a week so I had to create a lot of material all the time. So I would stand in the small hallway of my tiny apartment, trying to create material. So it was during those 5 years in New York, standing in the apartment, making material to very musicality songs. I think that was the best training. I think I have my class choreography and my stage choreography. They are not super different, but yet there is difference. There is stuff I would do in class that I wouldn't necessarily put on stage. But sometimes I take the material that I make in class and I change it to be more appropriate for stage or film. But I rarely start making material without the music. It usually comes from the music, because that's how Siv, my mentor, worked. When teaching class, she would make the material on the spot. She will rarely come prepared so she will just have a song and then she makes up this extraordinary material on the spot. She is very quick at it. So I see how she works to create the material and it's kind of like throwing your body into the movement and see where it goes, instead of thinking like 'what if I take the right arm'. It needs to come from the body. It needs to come from a feeling. It needs to come from a sensation. And for me, if I listen to the music, the music will tell me what to do. The musicality or emotional lyrics, I just really try to listen to that and then it's there. It doesn't really become me trying to create something. I'm just trying to do with my body what the music is doing. I try to become the music with my body."

Is this something you mainly do when you teach a class? Is this the difference with when you make something for on stage or is it something you do in both? What is the difference?

"If I would make material for a class I teach tomorrow, I wouldn't stress about repeating movements because it's more for the moment, more for the educational purpose and the joyful

purpose of being in class. If it's staged, I have to think 'How will this look on stage? How will the audience feel this material? How can this material be done in a group?'. If it's class it's more about the movements, but if it's on stage I also have to think about the overall picture of the choreographic sense. Like now with Palucca I made a piece and I wanted to make a section where I divided them in 4 lines. The first and the third line was gonna do one material on the floor and the second and the fourth line was gonna do another material at the same time. And then I'm think maybe the material for the first and third line has more sense of up and down, but maybe the material for the other group has a sense of more flat and diagonals so that I can get different kinds of variety. And if it's for class combo, it's more just like 'make it and don't think about it more than just for class'."

So then maybe on stage, there is also more an aesthetic part coming in that's not that important in class?

"Yes exactly, that's very concrete. On stage it's more about the aesthetic. It's more about the visual appearance."

And in class more the sensational appearance?

"Yeah."

How would you define yourself as a dancer and choreographer? Would you say Jon the dancer is different from Jon the choreographer, or how do they relate to each other?

"I don't think I know that. I think when you look at choreography or when you look at a piece of a choreographer on stage, you can see what kind of personality the choreographer has through their choreography. Recently I've watched a lot of videos of Martha Graham. She was a dramatic power house and her stuff on stage is powerful, it's dramatic, it's strong, it's grounded, it's full of 'aghh' this kind of feeling. I think instead of thinking who I am as a person, if we would analyse my choreography or material, I think or hope we could say it's very dynamic. It can go from very small to very big, from very soft to very hard, from very powerful and extrovert to more soft and introverted. It has like all of these nuances. And me as a personality, I'm not very afraid to just be myself. I don't necessarily have, I mean we all have doubts like if we're not good enough and all of that stuff, but most of the time I'm like 'whatever, let's just do it'. Now that I was working in the Palucca school, it's very clear that some of the students are a little nervous and scared and of course they don't know themselves so sometimes it's difficult for them to attach the material in a correct way. Of course you have to think about what you're doing, but I say it's like you're thinking and then analysing if it's good enough and then you're doing it. But then I said you are too late. You just have to go. And also me as a person, I speak before I think about what I wanna say. That also resonates in my movements. It's more like explosive and surprising and it just goes. And that is also definitely my personality and as a person I'm not afraid of feeling. I'm not afraid of feeling the bad stuff or talking about the bad stuff. I'm also not afraid of showing that in the movements. I'm not afraid of showing that I can fall, that I can be weak, that I can be sad and that I can break my body. I'm not scared of showing those things and those are things that interest me, as a person also. But it's also because I've be lucky that me as a student could explore all those things myself with my teachers. It was in my training, it was not only technical training but it was a lot about the intention behind the movements, the emotional quality behind the movements."

I think that's also, when I'm in your class, you really create a safe space for students to just go and I think maybe that's also what really touches me always. Because you know, my mom has her own dance school, so when I'm dancing there I've always felt like a kind of, I don't know if it's a pressure, but that people are looking at me differently. And when I first was in your class I could really let go and it was also that nobody knew me.

“And for me also to create that safe space for others, I have to first create that safe space for me. If the teacher is not safe or allows themselves to not be perfect and all of that, I have to lead as an example. I cannot stand there and be very correct and you know, guarded, and then just ask everyone else to just open up. That wouldn't make sense. So for me to be able to work with students to open up, I have to work with myself to open up. And that is sometimes easier than other times, if I feel like maybe the students don't like what I'm doing, maybe they're tired or don't want to be there, then it's also more difficult for me.”

Kinesthesia can be described as “the muscular connection to our deepest feelings” (Gibson). How would you say, in your choreographies, the body and the emotions are connected? To what sense is this intentional or subliminal? When you choreograph, do you think about your ‘story’ beforehand or is it something that happens subliminally?

“I remember one class when we had a workshop in my college with maybe a life coach and we did this exercise with two students, like you and me now, facing each other. In this exercise we would say beautiful things to the other persons and when we would say these things like ‘you are beautiful, you are strong’ we would just have to look at their body language and the other person who got all these beautiful responses would open up their chest, they would soften, stand more tall. And then we would say bad stuff like ‘you are ugly’ and immediate they did this (*Jon closes his chest and looks downward*). It took me some years to understand the impact of this exercise, because I believe that dance is just a very extravagant form of body language. When you see a child jump, being happy or somebody win the lottery, maybe they jump. And I think in dance, if we want to manifest the feeling of joy, maybe do a grande jeté or lift up our chest or release. And if we feel sad or horror or disappointment, we would not necessarily open up our chest. We protect ourselves, close more in. If a person is nervous, they would never stand with their chest wide open, they would take two hands over their face. I try to bring natural, normal body language that everyone is doing, but try to bring more ‘dance’ into it, if that makes sense. There was one moment when I did the piece at Palluca when they were on the floor, lying in a twisted position with their legs and they were crossing their arms and had to pull back. And I saw that all of them were more like this (*Jon crosses his arms in a powerless, meaningless way*) and I said ‘You have to be more scared, like somebody is attacking you’ and then they curled and their hands gained more intensity. Instead of when I told them ‘Put more intensity in your hands and contract your chest more’ I said ‘We all know how it feels to be scared’. I also think my style or my material is also very based out of the shared humanity feelings. I think if you are open enough or willing enough to feel and sense all that, it can bring in the kinesthetic memory of that. Like, I know how it feels to be loved, we just want to open up the arms and fall into somebody's arms, and when I'm dancing, I don't have to think about the exact moment when that happened, but I can just tell myself the word ‘love’ and I will open up. I remember with Leslie, it took a lot of time for her when she was my student in the beginning to open up, because she was more putting pressure and effort in being perfect and getting the steps correct and being clean and being perfect and being good. And when doing all those things, there is just a little space left for all that memory work and the future hopes and dreams. Again,

because my material is based on very spontaneous moments, and if you don't tap into that spontaneous feeling, it's almost like your kinesthetic awareness gets too slow and you're not listening to it."

Now I started thinking about stories or when you tell in class about a feeling, you always or at least often tell what the song is about or how you feel about the song. I remember the class in Italy when we did Zombie when you started talking about war and what happened with Lior and Jorden in that class, that was very (Jon: "Oh I forgot about that") very impressive.

"That's interesting, because what I said about when the students are open to it, I open up more. And sometimes I forget about things I said, like I totally forgot that I said anything about that, because I don't plan it. I am very aware and truly try to be present in that moment and then I forget I said anything about them. And that's also how I want the dynamics of dancing and I always tell my students 'Don't plan what you're going to do'. Do the steps, but don't plan how you're going to do them, be in the moment. And you know, you are a person Rosa, I am a person and Lior is a person, Jorden is a person. We all have very different lives, but we all feel the same things, we all have the same feelings. So when I say this is a memory of a struggle, of something that doesn't come easy, you need to push through something. Maybe my 'pushing through something' is very different from yours, but when you come to a certain age about 18 or 20 or 30, you have experienced some of those feelings. And then maybe it doesn't matter that I have a very specific memory. Me just saying it and giving an opportunity for the students, it's like my experience with Malaya. You know, when I took Malaya's class in Stockholm, she said 'This is about memories' and that's all she said. And when I was dancing, suddenly I thought about a person that I was in love with like 5 years ago. And I started crying inside myself and I was like 'That was really strange, where did that come from?'. And maybe just she saying that, me being in that moment, then putting that song on, and then it becomes like a collision of many different things. It becomes a collision of physicality, a collision of the mental space I was in and a collision of that memory. Many people do like 'No no no, too scary, don't want to feel it' and I'm just like 'Oh come on, let me feel it, welcome', because I also think it's our responsibility as artists to dare to feel those things for the audience to witness and for the audience to see."

Now you already answered my next questions, because I think what you told about Malaya's class is a great example of a kinesthetic experience you had as a dancer.

"Oh, yeah this is another. You know that solo I did with the hand up?"

Oh yeah, I also had a question about that! So maybe you can answer that at the same time. It's 'And we already knew the names' right? I was wondering what moved you when making this choreography and also when you did it again in the summer last year, maybe you had a lot of different feelings and emotions then when you created it.

"So this will answer a lot of your questions I think. I created that at NDT, where they have like a dancer's creating event called SWITCH. It's when the dancers of NDT can use the other dancers to choreograph. This was when I was at NDT and I was not feeling very happy. I was feeling a lot of pressure and I didn't feel like I was dancing like myself, I didn't really connect with any of my colleagues and I was like 'I think I just have to create this solo for myself'. And so from 2006 till 2010 when I was in university, I was in a relationship with a dancer, we were in the same class. His name was Christopher and he was like my first love.

And after we broke up I took a long time to get over this breakup. When we broke up we didn't speak ever again, we were completely out of contact and I had to shut him out of my life and I was like 'No no no'. And then I wanted to create something for this NDT evening and I wanted to do a solo and I wanted to do something emotional and I wanted to improvise. I didn't want to choreograph any steps. Also going through this break up, I couldn't look at photos from us together, it was difficult to speak about him and I realized I am really not brave in this. I am brave in many things, but in this emotional thing, I am not brave. So then I was like I have to do something so extreme. So I spoke with Siv, who was my teacher in Norway and I gave her like a USB that had photos and videos of me and Christopher, like silly photos of us in our relationship. And I told her 'Siv, I have not looked at this videos since we broke up, but I want you to find one or two clips of Christopher and I want you to put those clips together and I want you to just cut it into a 20 second film'. So the whole deal was that when I was on stage performing it for the first time, that the video of him would be projected. It would be the first time I would see it in like 4 years, just throwing myself into it. And then I remember maybe like 4 days before the show, I laid in bed and was like 'Oh Jon, now you are going to feel a lot and these are all private feelings, but maybe there's people in the audience that have the same feelings'. So that's when I came up with the idea to ask the audience questions to make them think about all their things you know. And then it was I guess literally the day before the show I wrote down the questions. And you know I ask the audience questions 'Raise your hand if you're sitting next to a friend; raise your hand if you're watching the show alone; raise your hand if you are sitting next to your boy- or girlfriend; raise your hand if you're single; raise your hand if you want to have a relationship; raise your hand if you're married; raise your hand if you're divorced; raise your hand if you've ever been in love'. And then I'm building up their kinetic memory. They start to think about their memories instead of just a curtain goes up, I'm emotional and finish. I'm preparing them to see me ..."

(*our Zoom connection is broken*)

"I was preparing the audience to be vulnerable and to see me being vulnerable and to really feel that, they had to be vulnerable, that's why I asked these questions. And I remember the day of the show, when we did the light rehearsal they asked me if I wanted to practice or do a run through of my solo but I said it was ok because I would be improvising so I just wanted to see the light. And then, when we did the show I asked all the questions to the audience and then I went on stage and then I knew that by the end of the solo that video would come up and I hadn't seen the video. I didn't know what clip Siv had chosen or anything. And then I danced and I remember thinking when I danced like 'Fuck this is vulnerable, this is emotional' and the reason that I put a person up on stage is that this person is a symbol of Christopher, of that man I loved, just for me to have a reference. I remember thinking 'I'm not so sad actually during this dance, I'm vulnerable, I'm emotional' but I remember thinking I don't miss him so much. That was weird because I thought I would have missed him more. And then there is this moment during the end of the solo where I started laughing, because I started remembering good memories. You can see this in the clip I'll send you that I'm quite laughing at myself like 'What am I doing?'. And then the video came on and I was like 'Oh, there he is' and then I thought 'Ok that's fine'. And then I was asked to perform the solo in Korzo in Den Haag for 6 days in a row and I wondered where I would get all these emotions from. And I found some emotions, and I won the competition in Stuttgart and then went on a tour in Germany so I did the solo many many times, but there were definitely performances where I felt nothing. Where I literally was just like 'Jon, you don't feel anything but still dance beautiful' you know and it was more like me just dancing beautiful haha. But then

when I performed it in New York for the first time, it was in the beginning of my friendship with Leslie and it was the first time she saw me perform. And she definitely had a kinesthetic experience. She cried, she couldn't stop crying and it was of course I was beautiful, I danced emotional and she was like 'Wow Jon is beautiful', but she was like 'Oh my god I'm feeling so much and where are all these feelings from? I'm feeling things I haven't felt in years'. After the show she would come to me and I was not sad, I was happy about the good show, and she was like in my arms crying. She had a very strong feeling. And I've had times where I've seen other people dance where I had this feeling like 'Oh my god'. So now I forgot your questions... But yeah, me laughing at that moment when I thought I would be sad was definitely a kinetic memory. I thought I would be more sad, but it's quite ok and I actually had to lay my limits quite extreme to do what I did, but I had to do something so extreme to get over something that was so painful. I had to dance so emotional to get over it. It's like I had to inject myself so kinetically, so wrong to be ok with it."

In the beginning you said that improvisation is actually something that you didn't really do in school, and this solo was like full improvisation, so what does improvisation mean for you? Is it even more kinesthetic sensation than when you choreograph something for yourself?

"I think it depends, because after university I worked with Ohad Naharin. I did a show called Cameo, a Batesheva piece, that we toured four months in Sweden and that piece had a lot of improvisation: improvisational solos, improvisational entrances and we did Gaga for like 6 months every day and then you had to improvise with tasks in the show. So then for me improvisation became not just about 'Oh I'm free, I can dance, I can do whatever', it became more like 'Ok, I have a task and I will research what my body can do'. And before I started doing Gaga, I was so bad at floorwork, because in my school we did floorwork but it was all about 'Do this floorwork exercise'. But for me to become good or better at doing floorwork, I had to just roll around on the floor myself. So then improvisation became also a tool to discover like 'How can my spine move in all these directions?'. And in New York, maybe the first 1,5 year, I was also teaching a lot of open improvisation classes. But I would never just say 'Oh we're gonna improv' and just put on a nice song and let's dance free. It's more like a structure where I would give you a task and the task is there to guide you through discovering something about yourself and within that task, within having some rules we can then also allow ourselves to feel free. And you know, you've taken my improvisation classes, sometimes it's a physical task like 'We're gonna move our shoulders and elbows' and other times it's more in a memory way, or a future way, or an emotional way. But I wish that in my school days, we did more of this. And also, because now many choreographers are like 'We're gonna create a piece and you're gonna improvise and we're gonna film the improvisation and we're gonna use that as improvisational inspiration to create material'. We never did that as students, which I think is so important to do now, to be able to learn from our own improvisation, to extract like we improvise and then you're gonna take something from your improvisation and extract some material from it."

So when you did 'And we already knew the names' it was improvised. Did you give yourself also like tasks before, or did you just think like 'I'm gonna respond to what I feel on the music'?

"I'm gonna respond to what I feel on the music and ... no I didn't plan it I think. No it was more like being in the present, being in the moment, let the music guide. And you know after I did it many times I started also repeating something, so then I would make a conscious

choice 'Do a little bit of the same thing in the show you did yesterday' and sometimes I would do the exact opposite: 'If you would go on the floor on that part of the music, today you're not gonna go on the floor'."

John Martin defines dance as "a way to express all forms of emotional experiences". There is a lot of critique on this text, but actually I personally think there's a lot of truth in what he says. The critique I read about it was that when he describes dance as a way to express emotional experiences this is for a dancer, but that when he talks about an audience he says that when an audience looks at a dancer who experiences his/her emotions, that the audience can feel the emotions of the dancers on stage but not their own emotions.

"It's like if I'm on stage and I do something while feeling ashamed, it takes away the audiences opportunity to feel something? Like it's too forced upon the audience?"

Maybe it's that, but I think it's difficult. I definitely think that when watching a dancer perform you can feel different things or add your own emotions to that. I think what Martin says is that you can only feel the dancer's feelings, but not your own. That it's not your own emotions but actually the emotions of the dancer.

"That's interesting."

I also bring this up because there's a lot of critique on Martin, so my supervisor told me to be careful using his text. And I understand why she says that and the critique makes good points, but I actually agree with Martin on many points.

"That's good, you know. We all have opinions. And then it's just important that you write it in a way that you analyze why for you, you agree, that there's something inside you why you agree. Cause we all have opinions and we have the right to have our opinion, but also the right to look at it from different perspectives."

Something that's difficult in my thesis, but that you helped me a lot with, is that I make a lot of statements from things I experience myself or things I feel or things I remember, but that are not written in literature. But I think that a lot of things I experience, you experience as well, for example in a class of Siv. So that's really helpful for me to prove my point, you know.

"I think it is also very interesting for you to have a talk with Leslie, because she has experienced the same things as you and because she's intelligent, maybe she can explain it in other ways that has the same meaning of you. She would be totally open for that, you know.

I was also planning on asking her yes, so thank you. There is one last thing I would like to ask your opinion about, and that is a statement I make at the end of my chapter. It's about the relationship between an audience member and a dancer versus a dancer in class with a choreographer. I read a lot about kinesthesia and most of it is about the experiences of an audience member, when they see a dancer perform on stage. But I think when I'm in your class, I experience a lot on a kinesthetic level and I'm like a kind of audience member in class. Do you understand how I make this shift? I see you explain or kind of 'perform' your choreography in class and then it relates to my feelings.

“I think it depends on the kind of class you take. If you take a ballet class or have a teacher that doesn’t demonstrate then it may be more difficult. And then you have so many teachers that make the class all about them, like they want the students to be an audience. They use a normal dance class, a studio, as a theatrical platform for them to show their dance. It’s like my friend in Norway, I remember I sent her a video one time of a teacher in America where all the students are sitting in a circle looking at this teacher dancing and dancing and dancing. And I told my friend in Norway, her name is Caroline, it doesn’t make sense to me. Why is the teacher dancing? Why is it not the students dancing? And she said ‘Oh Jon, it’s very clear. This teacher maybe wants to be more on stage’. They want to have an audience looking at them dancing. Of course, I also don’t have a problem people looking at me dancing, and sometimes I tell my students I’m just gonna show these two counts of eight, I wanna show you how much potential the movement has if you really go deep into the musicality. Then I show, because it’s for them to understand something, not for them to think like ‘Jon is so good’. So I think that this ‘kinesthetic audience’ in class can also go the wrong way. Or it can be very inspiring, but that’s a very fine line. Oh my god, it’s like with Malaya. When she shows the combo I definitely feel like an audience member, but maybe for some people it’s not inspiring.”

Yes, maybe it’s also like going in the wrong way, since you have a lot of professional dancers who start teaching but are actually not passionate about teaching.

“When they are not done being on stage.”

But I think what I also mean is that, when I write in my text that they also speak a lot about how when you are a dancer or at least a move that is strongly connected with his/her body and feelings, that you are able to get a deeper kinesthetic experience or connection because you connect easier your feelings and your body, than when you are a passive audience member who doesn’t have this.

“Yes these sensations. That is why I do Gyrokinesis. I mean, it’s already in the word: ‘kinesis’. You have to feel what you’re doing and you have to experience what you’re doing. Yesterday I taught a warm-up for the students in Palluca before the rehearsal and I told them ‘Open your chest and you can physically open your chest and allow to relax into the openness’. And so many of them were like this (*Jon shows how they couldn’t open their chest more than a tiny bit*). Completely blocked, don’t want to go there. I said ‘reach beyond’ and I’m like ‘How do you reach beyond? What does that mean?’. You have to use your fantasies. I think when we are kids, we have so much more kinesthetic feelings. You know, when you tell a kid to show how strong he/she is, they do this (*Jon flexes his arm muscles*) and they just go to the core. Or when you tell a kid to run as fast as they can, they will run until they fall, but a grown up person is scared of running as fast as they can because they are scared of not being fast ‘enough’ or falling. So I think sometimes that we train away our natural instinct. And for me also Gyrokinesis has taught me so much about what you are actually feeling with what you are doing. You have to experience what you are feeling. When you do the wave, yes your spine goes like a wave, your bones move, your joints move, your muscles engage. That is a practical feeling, but what happens if you put in the feeling ‘be like the ocean’? Oh. Well I know how the ocean sounds. How can that respond in my movement quality? So I think that this whole kinesthetic thing is about the quality of the movement, so it’s not just a practical thing. But for many people, they are scared or feeling all of this. And then it’s very difficult to be a student in my class. They will be like ‘Noooooo’. Or other people get the feelings like you have, like ‘Now my life has changed’. And it’s really not so

much about me, it's because it's an open place and I give the opportunity for you to feel all that."

Yes, that is exactly what happened in Stockholm the first time. Haha.

"Yes and for me, that was just a whatever class, it was just another class I was teaching. I didn't go into the studio thinking I'm gonna change peoples' lives or thinking I'm gonna let this student feel something she didn't know she had to feel, you know."

It is such an interesting thing to think about, how dance or movement can change something emotionally and then in your life. And I don't think I can concretely answer this in my thesis, but...

"Yes, and then you can say this, that it has to deal with something larger than us. Call it magic, call it the beauty of life. But you can also say like 'I thought so much about this'. You can say 'I've read, I've studied, I've talked to people, I've analysed and I've also realized through research it cannot be written in words, it has to be felt'. That is a valid answer. How do you describe with words when somebody feels they have been touched by God, or they have seen angels? That feeling can never be the same thing when it's written."

I also think that that's like the quote 'Dance is the written language of the soul'. Dance is an artform that expresses things you cannot put into words. So I think it makes sense I cannot answer this questions. Also because most of the texts I read are not written by dancers, because for a very long time dance has not been seen as an academic form of answering questions because it's not something put out in words. And I think that this is why kinesthesia from a dancer's point of view might have not been written about so much, because most of the researchers are not dancers themselves.

"And then it's like me researching about Spanish when I don't know how to speak Spanish."

You have to speak the language, the language of dance.

"But talk to Leslie, that will be good for the thesis."

Appendix 2

Interview with Leslie Plummer – 30 May 2021

That's why we dance, right? Because we don't have words to say what happens... I don't know how to explain it, other than there's some sort of energy transference that happens between us, I believe, an emotional transference. It's like that empathetic compassionate side of humanity, that we can all tap into I think. And being open to that, because a lot of people have boundaries up, are guarded or defensive. Being emotional is terrifying for them and I think it's like stripping away. Jon Ole's class is not just a technique class where you learn choreography and musicality and dynamics, cause that's all great, obviously that's a main reason you start in a dance class because you need to be taught those things as they don't normally come natural to people. But the thing that can't be taught, I think is what you have as a dancer and what Jon Ole has as a dancer, which is that kind of surrendering into the emotions that hide in the movement, or tapping into your soul, and letting go completely. Knowing that your technique is there to support you and it is your foundation, but knowing that that is strong and you can trust it, I mean isn't that complete freedom too, like as an artist and human being?

You use different words than I do, which is really nice, cause that helps me.

...

Is kinesthesia where it's like the physical movement causes an emotional reaction?

...

The first video I use is from *Silhouette*. That was the first time when I danced his choreography and then I collapsed and I cried and then I wanted to quit my studies, haha.

First time I did *Silhouette* I also cried. I think I cried almost every time. Cause what happens too, I think, is this kinesthesia, but it's also that I feel like you face your demons, you face that ideal judge inside yourself, because as dancers we want to achieve a perfection that maybe doesn't exist. So we come head to head with all those judgements and maybe even traumas, past traumas, like whatever it is that is held in the body. It's such a katharsis, his class is a katharsis. And sometimes you just don't know how it's gonna go that day. Like, having studied with him for three years straight in New York City and then getting to travel around

with him, I would get angry at times too. Anger and hurt would come up and I couldn't explain, like what that emotion meant. For me, I think a lot of trauma was stored in my body

...

Anyway, I think that sort of was my personal story and I know that every person comes into a dance class with their own story of what they have been through or what they haven't even acknowledged. Like maybe they don't even know, maybe they are not aware, maybe they haven't even had therapy and there's like stigma against therapy in different countries. Dance has always been that for me. It's been like a refuge, a place to express whatever I can't say. So in his class particularly it's been like a kind of spiritual, emotional transformation process, journey, that did never stop. It never stops. Everytime I go into that class and he starts the music and he's like 'and raise your arms up', I'm like 'oh here we go', like what's gonna happen now? You know, cause you are trying to be as present as you can in your body and in your mind and in your soul. It's everything. It's not just one thing and I think that's really challenging for any person to walk into, which is maybe why his numbers started to dwindle in New York City, because it was way too intense for people. They just wanted to come and take a dance class and move and look good doing it, feel good. Not to be always challenged. But I know that you get what I'm saying, right.

Yet, totally. And I think I recognize a lot of what you say. Not in the same way, but I had a lot of trouble with finding what I wanted to do with my studies. So the first time when I went to Stockholm to dance with him, I collapsed and wanted to quit my studies and just dance. And I had just quit my former academic studies after two years pushing away the feeling of wanting to quit and now I felt like quitting my new studies as well. So when I came back from Stockholm I was really confused about everything in my life and then I went to see a therapist for one time which really helped me just to release everything. And then the year after, when I came back to Stockholm and you were there too, the same thing happened again. So I don't know what that is, but it's so crazy.

Well... You know, I also believe in reincarnation. So I think it can also be more profound than what you've experienced in this lifetime. And I don't know if you go there or if you believe in the bigger picture things, but for me that's how I make sense of some things sometimes. You know, you are not meant to remember your past lives, because you are meant to be here in the present, living your life in this journey, in this body. But it's like, sometimes there are just things you can't explain and that's why I have faith. It's like a spiritual faith. I

don't ascribe to any religion, but if I did it would be something in hindoeism, like more eastern philosophy. I was raised catholic and for most of my life I went to a catholic school. And I think that I never really felt something, but I always felt something when I danced.